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That Which Is Not What It Seems: Queer Youth, Rurality, Class and the Architecture of Assistance

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**THAT WHICH IS NOT WHAT IT SEEMS:
QUEER YOUTH, RURALITY, CLASS AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF
ASSISTANCE**

A Dissertation Presented

By

KAILA G. KUBAN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 2010

Department of Anthropology

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DEDICATION

For Ili Stern
who taught me there were stories which had to be told

And for Birdie, Jane and Stella
for letting me tell theirs

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Scholars know – or ought to know – that they are privileged to lead their lives with their books in their groves of like-minded people. It is a privilege to devote the principal portion of one’s waking thoughts to the evolution of the starfish, or to the fate of an artist, dead these long centuries, or to the brief tenure of one particular Ottoman emperor. Anyone who does not feel privileged ought not to be doing it...Anyone incapable of appreciating the rare jolts of delight that can come from finding something out – something wild & obscure, buried in history or chipped from the unknown – ought to be in another line of work.”

– Jean Hanff Korelitz

Writing a dissertation is a privilege.

Writing a dissertation with the support of family, friends and mentors is a blessing.

Sometimes that support is educational, more often it is emotional, and far too often it is economic. In my case what it was most of all, was *constant* - and for that I am forever grateful.

But writing a dissertation is also heartbreaking. Because it’s like spending a year intensively focusing in on just one part of your life (the capital R research) and writing down all that you can about everything that happened and why and when and to whom. You get all the inside jokes recorded – some on tape – and that is priceless when months later as you sit at your desk under a mountain of tapes, transcribing with headphones on (so no roommate hears anything) you suddenly burst out laughing like a madwoman, cackling so loud because you just heard and got to relive the moment that sparked some ongoing joke or phrase or inside mannerism that you have with your friends (but the origins of which you had long ago forgotten) right there on tape. It’s a great feeling, but one that makes you remember all those jokes on the other side of your life that you will never remember. The recording makes you think not only of the recording itself, but

about everything you didn't record, couldn't record, not only in your research project but also in your life.

And then you take this year or two or three of your life and you lay it all out on your floor desk bed every surface in your house and you try to figure out something about it – something *else*, something beyond the inside joke, the remembrance. Something so unique and then not so unique too so that it can be useful to the outside world and in some way generalizable. You take these friendships and relationships and you try to boil them down, or you try to keep them breathing – either way, you struggle – *how do I make this big scenario full of deep interactions between a cast of characters with intricate connections between and history with each other and make it make sense on the page to a bunch of people who don't know me OR these folks I'm writing about?* Or you wrestle with *how do I take these people who I love and have known for so long and who I have seen grown up – as they've seen me – how do I do right by them, show their in all their beautiful and hilarious complexity and agency?* Either way, you pay, you agonize – you alternatively want to throw up, and then run down the street in a triumphant and slow motion *Chariots of Fire* montage when something actually works (the nausea is more frequent).

Yet in all that there is some beauty. Some of it is imposed on the scene when you play the music that helps you through. At various times in the year of dissertation writing my downstairs neighbors suffered through endless replays of (and off-key singing to) whatever song of the moment was getting me through to that next line, that next paragraph, that next chapter. But most of the time the beauty comes from the support you receive from people or from things – and in my case there were plenty of both. I begin,

because it's easier, by acknowledging the 'things' - the most important of which was the book *Landscapes of Betrayal, Landscapes of Joy: Curtisville in the Lives of its Teenagers* (Childress, 2004). Reading that book helped me decide to write the dissertation after all rather than ditching academia and moving to New York. At a time when I thought I'd have an easier chance at becoming the worlds first 30-year-old *prima ballerina* for the New York City Ballet, or being discovered for a talent I didn't have while sitting in a soda shop than actually finishing the dissertation, this book – and later, the man who wrote it – would pretty much singularly change my mind.

Thank goodness.

Other things that brought me comfort during this time of 'dissertating': baths (and all manner of foamy delicious bath bubbles), Yoga (and all the sweeping cultural appropriation that makes it possible for me to 'study' this ancient art via DVD in my livingroom between chapter revisions), my guitar, any and all music by Kris Delmhurst (listened to in my office, in my car, at the Iron Horse or even, back in the day, at The Tir Na Nog), the path along the river at Smith College (and yes, taking advantage of the 'natural' resources of a private college for free while writing a dissertation on *class* at a public university never lost its irony, but it did help keep me sane), Sachems Head, Snowshoes, Siblings (biological, step, and chosen), Trivia at Packards, Work group with the ho's, Bantus with Fla, Serial Killer nights with Chris and Hana, and anytime I got to be outside with Megan, but especially the first swim of spring 2007 or – as I came to remember it – 'the day of the disco bugs'.

Yet more important than all of these things are the people who stood by me through ten years of graduate school. First and foremost my advisor and mentor Dr.

Jaqueline Urla deserves most of the credit from turning me from a student into a scholar. It took a decade of her teaching, guidance, and support to get me to this point, and it is truly a debt that I can never repay. Likewise my committee members Dr. H. Martin Wobst, Dr. Julie Hemment, Dr. Lisa Henderson and especially Dr. Herb Childress gave their time, feedback and encouragement with a graciousness that never failed to amaze me. My graduate colleagues Lisa Modenos, Flavia Stanley, Rafi Crockett, Kim Koester, Milena Marchesi and Claire Wendland made graduate school bearable – and even *fun*.

But if it takes a village to raise a child, then it takes a small army to raise a graduate student – and many of these platoon members resided outside the halls of my academic institution. The most important members of the ‘get Kaila through graduate school’ squadron are my family (dad Karl, mom Valerie, brother Josh, stepmom Annette, brothers Victor and Eric, grandma Helen, and sister Chris) who talked me through every academic and personal crisis of the past decade, who edited drafts of my papers (thanks Pops), who sent me money for groceries – and even paid my rent - when my loans were late, and who – perhaps most importantly – provided me with a safe place to land far away from grad school. I love you all more than you could possibly ever know.

Aside from the family I was born into, I am blessed to have a chosen family that has likewise helped me survive graduate school. I can honestly say that without the patience and guidance of these lovely people this work would never have been realized. What follows is a list (in no particular order) of those kind souls who have – at one time or another – encouraged me, loved me, engaged me in theoretical debates, listened patiently to my venting and just generally kept me sane during this seemingly endless process: Megan Greene, Lisa Modenos (“look what you made me do, look what I made for you!”),

Flavia Stanley and Chris Grinnell (for the couch time, the supplies drop offs and the sing-a-longs), Hana Hilliker (for introducing me to the guitar), Milena Marchesi, Rafi Crockett, Daria Medwid, Amanda Mullen, Nicki Skipper, Jenny Robertson, Amy Burton, Jen Labie, Hannah Della-Costa (for wonderful transcription), Jean J. Schensul, Marlene Berg, The Haymarket Crew (for keeping me caffeinated and fed), Valerie Harms, Karl Kuban, Joshua Kuban, Annette Rubin, Michelle Tewal, Victor Casas-Rubin, Eric Casas-Rubin, Helen Kuban (who never understood why this whole grad school thing took so long, but saw me through it anyway), The West Coast Kubans, Barbara Cruikshank, Linda Rahm, Bill Elliston, Kevin Anderson, Emily West, Jaymee C., Jeff Felderbaum, Jon Zibbell, Kyle S., The Rubin Girls, Nerissa Nields, Byron's mom (for the couch), the kind folks at 39 Graves (for the table), and Tracy Lee (for the home-cooked meals and, especially, the hugs). And last, but certainly not least, thanks to Emmalu who tolerated my yelling every time she walked across my keyboard while I wrote the dissertation, and for reminding me to stop staring at that little silver box and take time out to purr, stretch out in the sun, and nap on and off for twelve hours at a time. I can never thank any of you enough, I only hope I haven't forgotten anyone.

ABSTRACT

THAT WHICH IS NOT WHAT IT SEEMS: QUEER YOUTH, RURALITY, CLASS AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF ASSISTANCE

FEBRUARY 2010

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Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (or ‘queer’) youth are increasingly the objects of intense concern for ‘the state’, subjects of – and subject to – a panoply of interventional programs designed to mediate against queer youths’ ‘risk-taking’ behaviors. While the material and structural realities of queer youth’s lives are discursively absent in policy formation, they largely determine policy implementation and significantly shape policy reception, as there is an uneven distribution of state-based queer youth programming in Massachusetts. In the Commonwealth it is primarily rural and working-class community-based organizations that receive most of the interventional programs, and thus it is working-class and rural queer youth who remain the primary – yet unarticulated - targets of state intervention. This research project is designed as an ethnographic intervention into the discursive absence - yet implicit operationalization - of class and geography in queer youth policy discussions and programming, exploring how working-class rural queer youth experience both their lives writ large as well as the programs designed to ‘help’ them navigate their way to a ‘healthy’ adulthood.

Incorporating principles of Participatory Action Research, the research methodology actively involved queer youth who were members of either a community-based queer youth organization or an education-based Gay Straight Alliance at a local high school, as well as a group of youth conceptualized as ‘policy refusers’ who attended neither organization. As class and geography can significantly shape the kind of engagement and messages that queer youth receive in policy and intervention programs, it may also determine the extent to which they participate in these programs. In exploring queer youths’ experiences with – or resistance to - such programs in a working-class and rural context, the project offers possibilities for understanding queer youth’s subjective realities as well the ways in which policies and programs often fail in attempting to reach such members of this ‘hidden population’. This collaborative project offers grounded insight into how queer youth coming-of-age in the economic and geographic margins of Massachusetts navigate their way to adulthood through, around, or in spite of the state’s programs of support and surveillance.

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PREFACE

ALL THE BEST LAID PLANS

“Just because something doesn't do what you planned it to do doesn't mean it's useless.”
Thomas Edison

In the summer of 2005 I presented my research project to the members of the Hilltown Sexual Minority and Ally Kids (SMAK) group. Having worked with these kids for two years the meeting was informal, funny, engaged and did much to relieve my anxiety about my upcoming research project that would address media representations of queer youth lives, and present these youth with modes for ‘speaking back’ to the dominant narratives - narratives which presented an overwhelmingly white, middle-class and (in both popular and policy discourses) ‘normal’ view of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth. For sure, I believed, these youth – who were white, but also overwhelmingly working-class or living below the poverty level, high school drop outs or home schooled kids, living in a rural area with a dearth of resources and opportunities were anything-but-normal and would shake up the policy makers visions of what queer youth looked like. Two years later, I wasn’t so sure.

What happened in those two years? Well, let’s just say that at my 2005 presentation I had little idea that I might change these kids lives, and no understanding at all about how they would come to change mine. But then, this isn’t a romance story - it’s not the heartwarming ‘*teacher turns tough kids good and they in turn teach her a valuable lesson about her own life*’ kind of story we have all seen play out on our movie screens with different titles every few years. No, I have found that the change which occurred in the interpersonal stage of this research is most difficult to describe, almost

imperceptible to the naked eye and nearly impossible to analyze in any systematized anthropological fashion. Yet it is there, intangible I would say if not for the fact that I felt it so intensely. This preface is my attempt to articulate, in a reflexive manner, what has happened, what I've tried to do and what has been done to me during this fieldwork experience. Right now, all I can tell you is that it all changed. My proposal changed, my research changed, and above all, I changed.

When working with teenagers in a low-income and rural area such change is inevitable. There are new jobs and new schools, dropping out and moving away, new boyfriends and girlfriends, breakups and fallouts, being kicked out and moving on, going somewhere, becoming something different. If I ever sought to know these youth, to make them the stable subjects that 'science' demands, to stop them, freeze them, and subject them to scrutiny – well, those plans were dashed before they were even hatched. Instead I found myself scrambling to keep up, to remember new numbers and keep coffee dates, to do drop offs and pick ups, to help with college applications to this school and that, the transfer application, the SAT preparation, the independent study for credits, the myspacefriendsterfacebook, the my new pictures (*have you seen them?*), the high school musical, the 2am call full of heartbreak and heartache, the drama and oh...the *drama*.

But it wasn't the *did you hear what she said about him* kind of teenage gossip I had been lead by MTV and 'My So Called Life' to believe ran rampant for those under the legal age to vote. No, this was a different kind of drama. It was the *that's my mom drunk on the sidewalk again*, the *those are the cops that busted our fire by the river*, the *that's the dude who walked by us and told us to take a shower and get a job*, the *that's the kid who found his bestfriend after he overdosed*, kind of drama. It wasn't the lazy

afternoons full of nothing to do till mom comes home, rather it was the 12 hour shifts that start at 5am, the *I burnt myself on the grill today at work and they told me I didn't need to go to the hospital but I should probably go home*. It was bleach kits passed out by social workers and cigarette clips saved to finish later after the packie was closed. It was pot smokers and excellent music. It was high school assemblies amid MCAS preparations. It was *I have to give my mom money to help with the rent*, and then later it was *I have nowhere to live*. And somewhere in the midst of all that there was a project. It wasn't the one I set out to do. And when I sat down at the end of it all with all my tapes and notes and my *what the hell is this* it wasn't what I thought it would be. But I had to believe that there was something there.

As I will detail, I had planned a research project that would explore and interrogate policy and media representations of queer youth where I would make use of my existing relationships with queer youth to explore their often silenced reactions to the images circulated about them. So at the onset of my project I thought it would be the *here's a bunch of media images about people like you, why don't you tell me about them* work I had planned. It wasn't. Instead it was *can you hang out? do you need a smoke? A ride? Some food?* It was *what did that guy say to you?* And *do you get that a lot?* And *do you think we should all get some pizza and talk about this harassment that's going on?* It began in Hilltown South and ended up in Hilltown North – moving in metaphoric and symbolic ways during its geographic migration. It started out at The Cafe and ended at The Avenue Coffeeshop. It started out focusing specifically on queer youth, and yet my conceptualization of the role youths' sexual-identities played in their lives shifted as I came to know better the daily contours of adolescence in this rural and working-class

community. Though we never could have imagined that back when we began the project. ‘We’ you ask? Yes – *we* – because it wasn’t just me on this crazy trip.

Indeed, early on in the research process I had hired a youth co-researcher in order to upset the traditional researcher/researched dichotomy, and the ‘adults talking *about* youth’ form that much youth research took. But as I’ll explore, this created - almost instantly - as many problems as I think it solved. Or perhaps more to the point, our collaboration became a ‘problem’ in the academic sense of the word – it was something to figure out, to trace it’s construction and it’s effect, it was something to get a grasp on, even as it slipped through our fingers. As I’ll explore in the chapter on ethnographic collaboration, or work together began with *how do we start* and ended with *where do we stop?* At first it was *okay, let’s analyze this interview transcript together*, and then it quickly became *where does this research end and our friendship begin?* Later still it was *your mom kicked you out, you can sleep on my couch*. But mostly it was just life.

Well, at least it was *my* normal life in the sense that in addition to my research duties, I had all the regular responsibilities of my pre-fieldwork life. I wasn’t 3,000 miles away, or living in some remote village. I was home, accessible by e-mail and cell phone. I was maintaining (or trying to maintain) my friendships, my jobs, my relationships, and my family life in addition to the new relationships I was forming (or trying to form) in the field. It was Friday night and am I in the field or can I go out? (*Kaila, can’t you “hang out” with the “kids” another time so you can come with us to the mall?*) It was birthdays and anniversaries and family events. It was teaching and grading and *can you present a paper on this panel?* It was tapes and fieldnotes and a car that saw too many miles traversing the short distance between home and the field. It was a car that became

an apartment and traveling research station full of empty water bottles and changes of clothes and pictures and tapes and *where did I put that?* It was years.

Years that ended so quickly. Because it seemed that almost as soon as it had begun, it was over, and then it was *how do you leave a research site you live in?* It was space - this new space that felt more and more like home, this old home that felt more and more like a hotel room. It was space – this space between you and me, between researcher and researched, between friend and family, between ‘Kaila’ and my fieldworking alter ego. It was *My Fieldwork/My Self*. And at the end it was just confusing because one day I was doing research and the next I wasn’t, but my relationships in the field didn’t stop, and I didn’t go anywhere. What, was I suddenly not available for late night phone calls and last minute rides just because I had arbitrarily decided that my research was – had to be – finished? It was difficult because I didn’t have the privilege (burden?) of packing up and taking that long bus/train/plane ride back to my home. For I was home, and had been all along.

In contrast, I had seen my anthropology colleagues return from their harrowing fieldwork experiences in far off lands. I had witnessed their transformation, their struggle to come home after fieldwork, their attempts to (re)consolidate their identities. I had listened to their reverse-culture shock, their attempt to remember right, *this is where I live, these are my people, this is the language I speak, this is my bed*. When my research ended it was a day like any other day - it was the same home, people, language, bed. So how did I find my borders again, when I wasn’t crossing any geographic, cultural or linguistic ones? What separated me from these people whom I spent so long getting to know and had come to be a part of their everyday lives? Ironically, the boundary I

ultimately drew was one I had struggled so long to work against – it was one of age. I had to remember that I wasn't a teenager, even as I had fought so hard to try to become one of 'them'. I had to remember that I had a job, that I hadn't been just 'hanging out' but gathering data that would ultimately have to be reviewed, analyzed and consolidated into a neat package under the heading 'dissertation'.

Ah yes, the dissertation. Two years of fieldwork later I wasn't sure what this dissertation would actually be about. I met with colleagues and advisors, explained that yes, I had spent years in the field but no, I hadn't actually done the research I had set out to do. *So, what DID you do?* I paused - my fieldwork had walked so far away from my proposal that I wasn't sure it was related in any but the most faintest ways to the neat and bounded and sensible (if not overly ambitious) prospectus I had laid at the feet of my committee a scant few years before. *Return to your prospectus, remember what it was you set out to do*, they advised. And so I did. I sat down with coffee in hand and read through a 55 page proposal that surely I had written but which I didn't even recognize. Here was some academic voice attempting to construct a set of questions about policy makers and visions of queer youth, about systems of surveillance and state-based programming, about media images and their vacuity in the face of the muddy real world experiences of rural and working-class queer youth.

There was even, I was shocked to remember, a section on the possibilities of failure in a collaborative and participatory project such as the one I was setting out to do. Indeed, I had built the possibility of failure into the proposal itself, scaffolded it there between poetic quotes from researchers before me about 'the best laid plans...'. But somehow even this – this academic and detached observation that I myself had made

about the potential pitfalls of my upcoming research – was distanced, formulaic, full of pretense but ultimately empty. For here I sat, seemingly none the wiser for two years in the field, but all the more confused and convinced of my failure as an academic, a researcher and a friend to these youth who had taken me in and tried their hardest to help me. Would this be what I had to offer in return - a drawer full of tapes, photos, fieldnotes and newspaper clippings? A couple of sentences written – then erased – then rewritten on the unforgiving whiteness of that new blank document saved, so hopefully, as dissertation.doc?

No. It was because of these youth – because of the time they gave me, the coffee they drank with me, the lives they opened up to me – that I would ultimately sift through that drawer of data, trawl my notes and tapes for themes and ‘a ha!’ moments, cover my walls in post-it notes full of significant quotes, and return once again to the memory of my fieldwork. And there – in the piles of data before me I found that I had indeed failed. No matter how many times I pored through my transcripts there wasn’t the data I had set out to collect. But what I also learned was that the project as I had originally conceptualized it was indeed *doomed to fail*, as I will explain, for it was grounded in (mis)understandings of adolescence and sexuality that didn’t take into account the realities of conducting fieldwork amid such a population. Yet if I had failed in my original undertaking, I had also succeeded in ways I could never have imagined, for in the data before me were important new questions about - and conceptualizations of – youth, class, sexuality and rurality.

In order to understand the significance of these new understandings I had to come to grips with the fact that my research had moved far away from where it had begun. The

first thing that I had to reckon with was that I was no longer dealing with the media, policy and public representations of queer youth I had set out to study, and featured so prominently in the prospectus. Why was this? What had happened? Perhaps the best way to explain this transformation is to talk about how I entered the field and explore the strange path the research then took. It is a cartographic project, illuminating my end point by showing you where I began and mapping the long and circuitous path that ultimately brought me to my destination.

Entering the Field: Planning Meets Real Life

‘The field’ is a clearing whose deceptive transparency obscures the complex processes that go into constructing it. (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:5)

Armed with an ambitious prospectus, and the best of intentions, I walked into a community I had come to know so well, called the youth whose numbers I now knew by heart (as they knew mine) and set out to disprove the prevailing academic, policy, and media representations of this group and offer them a place to ‘speak back’. How would I accomplish this? My methodological plan was to create a research group comprised of youth from Sexual Minority and Allied Kids (SMAK) whose goal would be to meet bi-weekly, over pizza and soda, and watch various media about queer youth (for instance, videos produced by policy makers and queer youth groups, as well as ‘mainstream’ representations of queer youth from places like MTV). Together we would deconstruct these images, analyze what was missing in these conceptualizations, and construct alternative representations with a special focus on class and geography. This never happened.

Why? For many reasons – most of them having to do with my own class and adult privilege which translated into ignorance about the class(ed) experiences of youth in the field. First off, at the time I constructed this research plan I had no sense of the logistical difficulties of carrying out such work with a group of youth who had incredibly busy and disparate schedules. Some of the youth were in high school (taking classes during the day), others were in community college (taking classes in the afternoon and evening), and all of them worked (some as after-school child care providers, others toiled away till late in the evening in cafes and gas stations, or in overnight shifts at factories). The hours between classes and jobs were few and far between - they were rarely, if ever, the same for two (let alone six or seven) youth - and they were precious. For these rare free hours were the only time these youth could hang out, spend time with their significant others, and go about the regular business of ‘being teenagers’ without the very adult concerns and responsibilities these youth dealt with far more often than their more affluent peers who were afforded the luxuries of adolescence. These were not the hours to be spent in a research group. Upon entering the field I was quickly forced to see this, and reckon with the naïve assumptions I had made about the youths’ schedules.

At the same time that I began my research I also began teaching at the community college in Hilltown. This dual teaching-researching role was designed to offer me a way to ‘give back’ to the community I was studying in while simultaneously offering me some money to use in my un-funded research project. In my first day at Hilltown Community College I stared out at my introduction to anthropology class and saw several familiar faces. Indeed, a handful of the youth I had known at SMAK – some who had dropped out of high school and others who had been home-schooled - were now sitting

in my classroom as students. Along with the rest of my class these students began to learn about anthropology, research and fieldwork, and I quickly came to understand that, while it wasn't the research group I had set out to initiate, what has happening was the beginning of a different kind of collaboration. Why not seize upon the opportunity of a shared knowledge base, vocabulary and area of study by training some of these youth to be co-researchers in my project after the semester ended? Indeed, I had been given a small stipend (of \$1,000) by Hilltown Community College for my work as a HCC Fellow, and after meeting with a few deans and explaining my intentions, they allowed me to use that money to hire two students (and former SMAK participants) to serve as co-researchers on the dissertation project. This money would allow me to compensate these youth for their time that otherwise would have to be spent at their other jobs, and also served to legitimize the research we were doing as a real form of work.

Here too, however, I was faced with logistical difficulties. It turns out that even with compensation offered, we were unable to plan regular work time between our three schedules, and soon one of the co-researchers needed to pick up more hours at her fulltime gig and was unable to stay on as part of this project. And so it came to be that the collaboration would be between just two of us – myself and one former student and SMAK youth, Birdie. Over the next year and a half Birdie and I would undertake an incredible amount of work together, as detailed in the sections on ethnographic collaboration. We came to know each other very well, and then also question how well we knew each other. We established a relationship that went far beyond the traditional researcher/researched division, and then again we would struggle against and within these boundaries. She would come to introduce me to almost every player in the research, and

the space between us would also become a major 'site' of the research itself. She would bring me to parties and gatherings, into her home and her daily life, and then again, she would come into mine. We were a daily occurrence in each others lives, and then again we were selective in what, and how, we shared about our selves and our worlds. We would sit and we would talk, and we would tape. We would talk and talk and tape and tape.

In the beginning we did lots of actual methodological and theoretical training together, reading and analyzing and co-interviewing and then co-analyzing. But towards the end, and throughout the project what we actually did the most of was agonize over the research together. For in different ways, we each had a very personal stake in the research we were conducting, and we both experienced it in profound and intimate ways. We were both 'native' to the research in some ways (at the time Birdie identified as straight and I as queer), and complete outsiders in others (I was the 'adult' and outsider with the youth, Birdie was new to the world of anthropological research). Our relationships – to each other, to ourselves, and to our 'informants/friends' – would be tested in ways we could not imagine, and in ways we often did not know how to handle. We were the blind leading the blind, but we were also at times brilliant, brave, hilarious, heartbroken, excited, disillusioned, so into it and then completely over it. We went through it together, but then we each experienced it differently and at times felt utterly alone and shipwrecked with our own expectations and realities.

On the one hand I was the expert, teaching Birdie how to conduct research, apply theory and analyze data. But then again Birdie was the expert, teaching me how to understand her peers, how to enter and make sense of their world(s), and how to become

a researcher. I questioned her, and she questioned me. I was her teacher, and then again, she was mine. I interviewed her, and she interviewed me. We taught each other, we fought together, and we tried to keep each other afloat. We were ‘both/and’, or in the words of a former student, in the relationship between us, “I studied the ethnographer and became an Ethnographer. I studied the subjects and became a subject.” Birdie was bright, articulate, completely connected, and up for anything. She was my ticket into Hilltown’s community of youth. Only, there turned out to be more than one youth communities in Hilltown.

As I will illustrate, the youth I had come to know as a cohesive unit from SMAK inhabited vastly different spheres outside of the community center where they met weekly. While they were all classified as ‘youth’ and as ‘queer’ or ‘queer-friendly-allies’, their lives outside of SMAK could not have been more different from one another. Three of the most major SMAK players, for instance, opened doors to three completely different worlds. Birdie, my co-researcher and closest informant, was a straight-identified home-schooler who began taking classes at Hilltown Community College at the age of 15. By the time we began the research together she was seventeen, had dreadlocks, and could often be seen hanging out with the youth in front of the Café – youth labeled as hippies by many in the community, but none of whom self-identified in that way. Sammy, on the other hand, a self-identified dyke, had dropped out of Hilltown High her junior year due to harassment. Having completed her GED at another local community college, she worked a steady stream of café jobs, and become a raising star in the local queer community. And then there was Mack, a young gay woman who graduated from Hilltown Technical School with a focus on auto-mechanics, and had

enlisted in the Marines at the age of seventeen with her mothers' consent. While she had been very 'out', identified as 'butch' and tried on male pronouns, her sexuality now became a point of scrutiny in her choice to pursue a career in the armed forces. All told, Birdie, Sammy and Mack represented three very different worlds and experiences. They were all completely unique and then again, they followed three very traditional paths available to the youth in (and often as a way out of) Hilltown: community-college, service work, and the armed forces.

The three of these youth not only became the central players in my project, they also ultimately helped to redefine what the project was about. While we never all sat together to critique media and construct alternative representations of youth (as I had imagined) one fall afternoon, by happenstance, the three of us found ourselves on the same Hilltown street with some time to kill. So we did research – and it wasn't the research I had anticipated. No, instead we sat in front of the café, poured over Mack's yearbook from Basic Training, and then accompanied Sammy as she 'got inked' (was tattooed). We drank coffee, we smoked a ton of cigarettes, laughed our asses off, and ate enchiladas. We went to the grocery store and there we talked about the Marines and sexuality and how to get the hell out of Hilltown at the same time that we wondered, looking at Mack's moms grocery list, if the spaghetti sauce she asked for should be generic or should we spring for Ragu or Prego? We talked and we shopped and everyone got a ride home that day. And this was a good example of the happenstance research group we were able to conduct, when our lives and schedules allowed. While we didn't focus on media representations, we explored the complex ways youth navigate their sexual, and other, identities in a community with scant educational and economic

opportunities. Within these scheduling confines we – Birdie and I – would find time to conduct interviews, analyze our research materials, and carry out a wealth of participant-observation about youth, class and sexuality, on the streets, and in the social and educational institutions of this rural and working-class community.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Without A Map

My journey began in 2003 when I was living in ‘Hilltown’, a small rural community located in Franklin County, in Western Massachusetts.¹ As I will explain further, Hilltown was formerly a thriving manufacturing center that had been hit hard by the processes of de-industrialization. One of the resources utilized by community members during this difficult economic and social transition was Hilltown Community Endeavors (HCE) - a non-profit, anti-poverty, community-based organization that offered a variety of services to Franklin County residents. One subset of HCE was Hilltown Youth Services which offered a number of youth programming projects and groups including Sexual Minority and Allied Kids (SMAK)² – which tended to attract older teens, primarily those aged 15 and higher. I was involved with SMAK for two years, first

¹ Hilltown, an amalgamation of many towns and (quasi) cities in Franklin County, is a fiction created to protect the identities of those places and people involved in the research project.

² A note about terms: there is much debate regarding the various labels given to those with same-sex behavior and/or identities. While some use the acronym GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender), others use the term sexual-minority. However, in my project I use the term queer – a label not used unproblematically as it has been subject to several different ‘definitions’ and has been resignified (for some) over the past several decades. I chose to use this term because unlike GLBT or sexual minority – ‘queer’ for me denotes a political position against heteronormativity, gender norms and also class and ag-based norms. As Joanna Kadi notes, “I am strongly attached to the word ‘queer’ and find it more appropriate than any other for describing my identity. I first read this word as a teenager, where ‘queer’ described girls who refused to obey strict gender codes...Today the word ‘queer’ captures not only my sexual identity but my class identity as well. It accurately positions me on the margins of the class hierarchy, without any chance of being ‘normal’, that is, middle-class. And the in-your-face power of this word speaks to the pride I experience from my class identity, in strong contrast to the shame I felt growing up” (1997:31).

as a volunteer and later as a paid program coordinator. Over those years I came to know these youth very well, was privy to many intense and personal conversations during our weekly meetings, on the long rides to out of town events, and then later, in the phone calls I received from the youth as a trustworthy adult friend and ally.

During this time I also served as a Councilor on the ‘Gay and Lesbian Youth’ division of a state-based policy advising board I will refer to here as the Council On Massachusetts’ Adolescents (COMA) where I worked on state-wide policy implementation for GLB³ youth programs and services. As I made the monthly trips between the youth group in Hilltown to the policy making meetings at the Department of Public Health in Boston, I began to notice a divide between the policy makers’ conceptualizations of queer youth (who they were, what sorts of things they did) and the real life experiences of queer youth I was coming to know with increasing familiarity. Like any good graduate student I began to explore this dissonance by reviewing the academic literature and research on queer youth. So here I was, a graduate student, who split her time between *working with* queer youth in a community-based program, *implementing programming for* queer youth in the state-level policy group, and *reading about* queer youth in her academic pursuits. And indeed, the more I read the more I came to see discrepancies between psychology-based developmental conceptualizations of queer youth and the everyday lives and experiences of the queer youth I knew in Hilltown – discrepancies which mirrored those I saw operating on the policy level at COMA. So I began to wonder why it was that the queer youth I knew seemed so

³ COMA served gay, lesbian and bisexual youth – but faced internal division regarding the inclusion of ‘transgendered’ youth as well as those who identified as ‘queer’. As a result, these two terms were left out of the COMA board’s title.

different than the youth I read about in some academic scholarship and the ones I helped construct programming for on the policy-making board.

This dissonance was visible not only to myself but also to the youth I knew. As one of them so eloquently put it, “that’s how I feel about books written about people in my age group...like they never actually portray what’s going on in my life. They’re always like very abstract and distant and kind of guessing about what’s going through a youth’s mind rather than like having a youth actually help write it, or talking to youth. Or they talk to youth and then they take it completely out of context and turn it into statistics.” And indeed, it was the statistical ‘risk behavior’ of queer youth that I had read so much about in my research pursuits, and that COMA had put forth in countless press packets and reports. The conceptualization of queer youth as a population ‘at risk’ is, by all accounts, the dominant understanding of this group of youth (and indeed, of adolescents writ large, as explored in the following chapter). But, based upon my experiences working at SMAK, I wasn’t sure these youth were ‘at risk’ – or at least perhaps not in the ways that the scholars and policy makers assumed them to be. So I set out to explore this perceived division between academic and policy discourses about queer youth ‘at risk’ and the grounded experiences of the queer youth I knew in Hilltown through ethnographic research. After all, this is what ethnography is best at – addressing the gaps between ‘real life’ and our imaginings of it. In order to understand the cultural discussions circulating about queer youth in the United States at the moment I set out to conduct field research I began by tracing the theoretical and paradigmatic shifts in the history of queer youth studies via a literature review, to which I now (re)turn.

Queer Youth, Policy & Agency: An Introduction to the Research Problem

In setting out to conduct my literature review for the research prospectus I turned to the earliest studies conducted about queer youth. What I found in these sources, and what was commented on by later scholars conducting similar reviews, was that the earliest research into this population drew their participants primarily from urban mental-health and social service programs. Given that these participants were in some ways self-selected – as they had sought ‘help’ in these settings - later researchers, such as Ritch Savin-Williams would ask, “how typical were these young people? How could inferences be drawn about gay development from those *most likely to be suffering physically, psychologically and socially*,” (2005:58 – my emphasis). In contrast, I contended that these youth were not the ‘most likely’ to be suffering, rather they were the ones most likely to seek relief for their suffering in public and social service agencies rather than through private counseling or treatment programs. While it was likely the lack of financial resources which brought these youth to public assistance programs, this aspect was systematically ignored in the research which prioritized youths’ sexuality and ignored all the other constitutive identities of their research subjects.

Indeed, in this research it was the *sexual* identities of gay youth taken to be primary and determining that was conceptualized as placing them at high ‘risk’ for a host of problems from drug addiction to homelessness (Roesler & Deisher, 1972; Remafedi, 1985, 1987a, 1987b). These research findings were then central in the construction of GLBT youth services, like Hilltown SMAK, established as Savin-Williams notes to, “address the critical physical, educational, therapeutic, and social needs of gay youth,” (2005:54). In addition to providing services for gay youth, early organizations such as

the Institute for the Protection of Lesbian and Gay Youth (IPLGY, now the Hetrick-Martin Institute) provided researchers with a ready-made “pool of potential research subjects,” (ibid.). Not surprisingly, several studies produced at IPLGY echoed the findings of earlier researchers in noting, and then also expanding, the range of risks faced by gay youth (Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Rotheram-Borus, 1992, 1994, 1995). Perhaps in response to those who might posit that these youth were already mentally unstable (indeed, a contention Savin-Williams would make several years later) these scholars stated that there was, “no evidence that the agency attracts primarily troubled youth,” (Rotheram-Borus, 1992:77).

Yet given the institutes’ urban location and free services it is likely that the agency attracted primarily poverty-level or working-class youth, or those whose families’ refused or were unable to provide them with private treatments. Despite the probability that a significant portion of the research subjects in these early studies were economically disenfranchised, the class backgrounds of these participants were unarticulated, unanalyzed and invisible – a trend that continues to the present day in research on queer youth. Because neither class nor the urban setting of these studies were not conceptualized as important mediating factors for these youth, the research findings from these studies were assumed to generalize to the entire spectrum of same-sex oriented youth *regardless of context*.

This early research was central in conceptualizing queer youth as ‘at risk’, a framework assumed to apply to all queer youth, that ignored not only youths’ class backgrounds, but indeed prioritized youths’ sexuality over all of their ‘other’ constitutive identities (including gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) and one which has served as the

dominant paradigm in circulation about this population (Savin-Williams, 2005; Russell & Bohan, 2001; Talburt, 2004). Importantly, this discourse has opened up a number of funding streams, primarily through public health venues, for organizations working with queer youth. Especially for organizations working in poorer communities, where they are dependent on outside funding, such as Hilltown SMAK, conceptualizing their service population through dominant ‘at risk’ public health paradigms is a central component in securing and maintaining financial support. A steady stream of academic research on queer youth at risk who draw their participants from the pre-existing group of research subjects provided by these programs have worked in a cyclical loop to keep this funding stream flush.

This framework was eventually brought under scrutiny by scholars urging a heterogeneous approach to queer youth focused on ‘in-group variation’ (Savin-Williams, 2001). The results of this shift are evidenced by the growing body of research which explores ethnic-minority GLBTQ youth (Kumashiro, 2001; Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999 & 2001; Monteiro & Fuqua, 1995; Sears, 1995), and gender issues (Diamond, 1998).⁴ Yet two other critical mediating and contextual factors in the lives of youth – geographic location and class background – remain largely unexplored in academic research on this population – an absence I viewed as vitally important to explore.

For as Kath Weston notes, “A person cannot ‘just’ study sexuality, because sexuality is never separate from history, ‘class’, ‘race’, or a host of other social relations,” (1998:4). And indeed the more I explored academic scholarship and participated in

⁴ As well as other topics such as “age, sequence of developmental milestones, degree of sex a-typicality, neruo-psychological abilities and social grouping,” (Savin-Williams, 2001:7).

policy level discussions, the more I came to believe that the discrepancies between the youth I knew and the ones I read about and created policy for were based on these important, yet rarely articulated, distinctions - namely differences based on class and geography. While a more thorough discussion of class and geography follows later in this chapter, I pause here to give an introduction to the research site – Franklin County – in order to explore the geographic and economic context in which the research took place.

“Utopia, Almost”: An Introduction to the Research Site

Beginning in the 1800s, Franklin County was an important industrial hub, home to important cutlery factories and textile mills in addition to Hilltown Tap and Die (HTD) which became the world’s largest manufacturer of these products (Jenkins, 1982:2). As such, Hilltown’s “supply of highly skilled machinists has always been much larger than that of other towns of similar size,” (ibid.) and it also served to attract a large number of immigrant workers. The high percentage of immigrant laborers would create an interesting situation in wake of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) enacted by congress in 1935. Among other things, the NLRA, (or the ‘Wagner Act’) included the following provision,

Sec. 7. [§ 157.] Employees shall have the right to self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection. [NLRA or the Act; 29 U.S.C. §§ 151-169: Title 29, Chapter 7, Subchapter II, United States Code]⁵

⁵ Cited from the National Labor Relations Board website at http://www.nlr.gov/about_us/overview/national_labor_relations_act.aspx

This was an important piece of legislation at a time characterized by growing labor unrest and union organizing in America's manufacturing centers. This was not the case in Hilltown, where, as social historian of the area Paul Jenkins explains, "what primarily inhibited labor unrest...was [Hilltown's] rather unique response to the presence of immigrant mechanics," (1982:107) which included at least one factory owner who "set out deliberately in the mid-1840's to replace a native-born work force, which he considered too restless, unstable, and greedy, with European cutlers. He undoubtedly counted on immigrants' sense of displacement and unfamiliarity to make them undemanding" (ibid.).⁶

This welcoming of immigrant laborers (even if not made with the most altruistic of intentions) would ultimately shape the ethnic make-up of this community. Indeed, Hilltown's current ethnic makeup can largely be traced to the European immigrants who came to work the mills and factories during the industrial period. English, Irish and Polish have remained the dominant ethnic groups in this community, though they now all 'melt' into the category of 'White' on the U.S. Census – the overwhelming majority both in 2000 (at 95.4% of the population) and in 2006 (at 94.7%). While social and economic changes have brought more people of color into this community over the past several decades, both their numbers and their geographic locations remain small and

⁶ Interestingly, the 1970s would witness an intense labor uprising as young people in Hilltown created a strong union for employees of Acme Manufacturing (a pseudonym). The fight for union 'Hilltown – UE #247' would ultimately capture a broad audience by its inclusion in the documentary film entitled *Controlling Interest* (1978, California News Reel). As Jenkins describes, "[i]ntended to trace the effects of multinational corporations primarily on Third World nations, the documentary uses the instance of [Hilltown] in general and the [Hilltown - UE #247] situation in particular as a home-grown example of corporate indifference to the plight of underdeveloped economies. In the film, [Hilltown] becomes, by analogy, a Third World county, with [Acme Manufacturing] as its systematic exploiter." (1982:254)

marginalized.⁷ Meanwhile, vestiges of the strong white-ethnic traditions remain, with Polish-American and Irish-American community centers and clubs found in some number throughout both the north and south sides of Hilltown.

Returning to our economic and industrial history of this community, by the early 1900s – due to the mergers and acquisitions of the tap and die factory, “the exodus of the cutlery factory and the demise of the textile mill, more than two-thirds of [Hilltown’s] work force had been forced to change jobs” (Jenkins, 1982:131). Given that Hilltown had “depended disproportionately on the fortunes of one or two large manufacturers...This situation has created an atmosphere of nervousness” (1982:2) – one which would again be tested during the mid-1900s when Hilltown was notified about its position on a new interstate highway that was to be built from Connecticut to Vermont. As Jenkins notes,

To be in the path of an interstate highway posed a threat to the business stability of any community. But for at least some [Hilltown] people the proposal called into question the very survival of a way of life. To begin with, the existence of a superhighway would surely jeopardize the autonomy of the town....The town could end up as a bedroom community, a suburban-rural appendage of other Connecticut River municipalities. It also feared, rightly as it turned out, that [the freeway] would spell the final end of [Hilltown’s] importance as a rail crossroads. [1982:232]

Furthermore, the freeway was to be built on the outskirts of town, and thus held little promise of attracting visitors to the downtown commercial center. But if the freeway closed some economic doors, it also opened others. In the mid 1960s, after the construction of the interstate, two shopping centers were opened nearby, and by the early

⁷ According to the U.S. Census, from 2000 to 2006 the African-American population increased from .9% to 1.6%, the Hispanic population increased from 2% to 2.5%, the Asian population increased from 1% to 1.8% and the Native American/American-Indian population remained steady at .3%.

1970s, “motels, gas stations, and restaurants circled the exits from, and entrances to [the freeway]” (Jenkins, 1982:245). While this provided new economic opportunities for some, it threatened the small businesses in the town center, whose owners pushed for downtown revitalization.⁸ This facet of the community wanted to, “[k]eep the central area sharply defined; keep the rural rural. Then [Hilltown] would retain its familiar small town character and preserve its reputation for being – as consultants had commented in 1964 – ‘Utopia, almost’” (Jenkins, 1982:252).

By the late 1970s and early 1980s a combination of raised taxes and zoning changes resulted in an “exodus of companies” (Jenkins, 1982:255) out of Hilltown and into neighboring communities. Perhaps not surprisingly, such ‘defections’ were met by Hilltown residents with a range of responses from concern to relief (ibid.). The ensuing debates regarding Hilltown’s economic future – and its position in response to new industry – essentially split the community in two: those who wanted to bring in (outside) business and their money, and those who were staunchly opposed to this and believed that Hilltown could, essentially, revitalize itself. This debate continued for decades, coming to a head in the early 1990s when some community members led a vocal protest against a ‘big box’ retailer who saw a potential goldmine in this working-class community that had been left largely unemployed when the numerous factories and mills left the area for pastures which cost them less ‘green’. Despite the potential economic opportunities afforded by this retailer, the protestors cited the negative impact to locally

⁸ In relation to the freeway, Jenkins notes that these business owners wanted Hilltown to “[f]orget the fact that the original plan had advocated taking advantage of all kinds of new opportunities offered by [the freeway]. Forget the emphasis on subdivision development, strip commercial zoning, and outlying shopping plaza construction. This was an old, traditional community, and you couldn’t just pour aggressive new thinking into a vessel as venerable as [Hilltown] and not expect something to crack” (1982:251).

owned businesses, as well as to the integrity of this community, and were ultimately successful in keeping this retail giant out. This was not simply an economic question, as Jenkins notes that these (and earlier) debates over industry in Hilltown revealed that this issue was,

at heart a question of [Hilltown's] image of itself. If the town's attractiveness were considered to be the product of its semi-rural atmosphere, its relative isolation from urban clatter, it made sense to reject grandiose projects based on regional planning and federal grants, since such projects would inevitably lead to [Hilltown's] growth and loss of autonomy. But what if, on the other hand, the semi-rural self image had been something of a myth all along, and [Hilltown] as an economically distressed area needs jobs, jobs most of all? [Jenkins, 1982:258]

Indeed, according to the 2000 U.S. Census the personal income per capita in Franklin County was \$27,577 – well below the state average of \$37,704.⁹ According to the 2002 Community Needs Assessment conducted by Franklin Community Action Corporation,

in the past twenty years there have been a large number of plant closings and lay-offs. The region's economy is shifting toward the service sector, as well as to what is known as the 'knowledge' sector...The 'knowledge' sector offers higher wages but few jobs for workers at the low end of the education scale. [FCAC, 2002]

Despite the need for 'jobs, jobs most of all', the resistance to big business which was evidenced in the fight against the 'big box' retailer, both drew from – and itself reinforced – a mythology of Hilltown as a self-sufficient community which valued a 'small town' quality of life over mindless economic growth.

In this mythology Henry Ford was said to have identified Hilltown as a potential location for a major automobile production plant, but was turned down by the community. Whether this story is true or not is irrelevant, as Jenkins notes, "that the story of the town's refusal to go along with Ford...has had such currency over the years

⁹ FedStats, 2000.

reflects not so much the strength of the evidence as the peculiar power such an idea has retained in terms of the town's idea of itself" (1982:2). He continues,

the notion that Henry Ford could have been interested in [Hilltown] as a potential site satisfies the desire to acknowledge the role manufacturing has played in the town's development, while the notion that the town turned him down satisfies the desire to believe that [Hilltown] actually *prefers* to stay small and relatively quiet. Taken together, the town's picture of itself is of a community just one step removed from its country setting – an active, small, commercial and manufacturing center whose hum is thankfully dampened by rich valley farmland and sudden hills. [1982:2]

The question "to grow or not to grow" [ibid.] was still very much at play when I began my research in Hilltown during the early 2000s. At a moment when neighboring towns were becoming increasingly unaffordable, people began to look towards Hilltown as a possible place to live and to open their businesses. The tensions around the potential economic and social changes brought in by newcomers ran high, as Hilltown's physical 'situation' and proximity to the more well-to-do and largely academic communities to the south created strong contrasts of wealth and class. These anxieties were explained to me by Remi, an academic leader at Hilltown Integrated Knowledge Experiences (HIKE), the sole resource for post-secondary education, school-to-work transition and certification courses, and 'life long learning' workshops and programs in Franklin County. As Remi told me,

'Collegetown' has priced itself out of the creative economy, 'Universityville' is on it's way there...Hilltown is the logical next step.¹⁰ We're gonna see a lot of young hip creative people move to Hilltown and try to make it work, you see little vestiges of that with the folks around The Cafe or what people are trying to do at ArtSpace [the new gallery in town], and at the same time there's these old stalwarts within the community which feel like they're at odds...

¹⁰ Collegetown and Universityville are pseudonyms I use for two nearby towns in order to further protect the identity and location of Hilltown.

And indeed, these differing segments of the community in Hilltown were very much at odds, engaged in a struggle over the future of Hilltown. Would it welcome ‘young hip’ members of the creative economy with open arms and accept the economic and social revitalization they would inevitably instigate, or would it “maintain its semi-rural image in the face of so much competing activity and diverse interests” (Jenkins, 1982:6)? The community was fairly evenly split but it bears the question – what did they have to lose? Certainly an infusion of new money in the economy (be it through start-up businesses or higher rates of home ownership) would add to the cultural and material resources of the area. But in a community that defined itself as ‘fiercely independent’, a town “with so much to offer that Henry Ford was tempted to build a plant here, but one so jealous of its advantages it turned him down,” (Jenkins, 1982:6) – what was at stake was not just the protection of local resources, but indeed the *guarding of a certain way of life*.

In Hilltown, as Jenkins notes, “[t]here is a widespread feeling that time has somehow managed to pass naturally here, without sudden accelerations but also without concerted efforts to roll it back,” (1982:6). What the potential newcomers threatened to do then, was to fast-forward that clock, bringing with them new technologies and new modes of being in the world. At stake was a ‘strong sense of place’ that is in many ways unique to a rural setting. As HIKEs Remi explained to me,

sense of space and time is very different in a rural region than it is in Boston where you might drive 45 minutes to go to Chinatown and eat lunch - here if you have to drive 45 minutes it's like forget about it! Even though 45 minutes in Boston might be 20 miles, here it's a good 50 miles. Space and time get shifted in weird ways where it's like ‘go to [Collegtown]? Ah, no I don't want to go to [Collegetown], it's too far away’.

This ‘different’ sense of time and space is a key part of the (self)conceptualization of Franklin County as ‘rural’ – a label not used unanimously or unproblematically.

Rural Is As Rural Does

“I just never think of Hilltown as...*rural*” – it was a sentence I heard often in the halls of my academic institution located only twenty miles down the road in Hampshire County. For my colleagues in anthropology - some of whom had visited Hilltown for a weekend brunch or a leisurely Sunday stroll - the fairly active downtown area clashed with their (cultural) imaginings of ‘rural’ as rolling hillsides and dairy farms that characterized nearby Vermont (though of course, Hilltown had its fair share of those as well). I was never quite sure how to respond to this statement, for I thought surely Hilltown *was* rural, and though I couldn’t quite explain how or why, it was something I ‘just knew’. That such an experiential ‘sense’ wouldn’t hold up in a dissertation defense was a given, and so I set out to find out whether Hilltown was ‘really rural’ or not.

I began my research at the University of Massachusetts’ Center for Rural Massachusetts (CRM), an organization focused on, “accommodating community growth with minimal loss of rural character, instituting open space zoning, creating vital village centers, quantifying change in rural Massachusetts, and exploring alternatives for economic development,” (CRM website). After locating their ‘rural town listings’ page, I was surprised to find that Hilltown was not included. A visit to the Town of Hilltown website, however, proudly proclaimed - in the first sentence – that Hilltown was located in Franklin County, “the most rural county in Massachusetts”. What was going on here? I pressed on, and again came across another governmental website which referenced Franklin County in this way. What information did these people have, that CRM didn’t,

which led to this classification? I began a search for an original citation for Franklin County as the ‘most rural’ in the state.

After numerous calls to local governmental agencies, where I was transferred from office to office, I found myself talking to the Regional Council of Governments’ (RCOG) Economic Development Planner. This helpful woman explained to me that they themselves had determined Franklin County to be the ‘most rural’ county using information provided by Mass GIS (Geographic Information System). With this data set in hand they took the ‘total area’ for Franklin County and, dividing it into the ‘total population’ estimate from the 2006 Census, ended up with the statistic for ‘population density’. At a population density number of 100, Franklin County had by far the lowest population per square mile of any county in Massachusetts.

But was ‘population density’ the most correct, or even the most common, way of determining rurality? This question led me to the United States Department of Agriculture’s Rural Information Center, where they listed not *the* way of determining what is rural, but rather the “three most common Federal definitions of rural”.¹¹ While the U.S. Census also utilizes ‘population density’ to determine rurality, other federal offices use different models, with some of them at times defining rural through a simple process of elimination.¹² That I had found references to Franklin County as ‘most rural’ in one venue, and not classified as rural at all by another was thus no aberration. Indeed, due to

¹¹ These three definitions are ones used respectively by the Department of Commerce’s Bureau of the Census, the White House’s Office of Management and Budget, and the Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service.

¹² As the USDA states, “(m)etro/urban areas can be defined using several criteria. Once this is done, nonmetro-rural is then defined by exclusion – any area that is not metro/urban is nonmetro/rural,” (USDA website). In this scenario then, ‘rural’ itself is not characterized by any defining qualities, but simply by being ‘not urban’.

the different measurements of rurality used by various organizations, the same location may be defined in inconsistent ways depending on who was conducting the assessment.

As the USDA website notes:

Determining the criteria used has a great impact on the resulting classification of areas as metro/nonmetro or urban/rural. The Census Bureau classifies 61.7 million (25 percent) of the total population as rural, OMB classifies 55.9 (23 percent) of the total population as nonmetro. According to the census definition, 97.5 percent of the total U.S. land area is rural; according to the OMB definition, 84 percent of the land area is nonmetropolitan. USDA/ERS estimates that, in 1990, 43 percent of the rural population lived in metropolitan counties. [USDA website]

If you found the above paragraph confusing, you are not alone. Indeed, it would seem that a unified lack of understanding of what comprises a ‘rural’ area is rampant, even for governmental offices assigned the task of determining rurality. And as I soon found out, the difficulty of delineating rurality is a well known issue. As governmental researcher Betty Rios noted in an ERIC paper entitled ‘Rural – A Concept Beyond Definition?’ (1988), there are a range of quantifiable measures for determining rurality.¹³ Yet more interesting to me than the difficulty of reaching consensus on a definition of ‘rural’ are the tensions between quantifiable measures and community self-perception.

What I soon came to understand was that regardless of definitions and statistics – which will sometimes confer rurality on Franklin County and sometimes not – *Franklin County conceptualizes itself, and is experienced, as ‘rural’*. This is, in part, a self-

¹³ “Deavers and Brown (1985) have developed seven categories of rural areas based on social, demographic, and economic information. Economic categories include agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and government; social dimensions include persistent poverty and growth of retirement population; proportion of land in federal ownership comprises the final category. Horn (1985) looks at values, socioeconomic factors, political structure, locus of control, and priorities for schools. Croft (1984) suggests that an ecological approach comprised of cultural values, number of people, and ambiance can be used to work toward a definition of rural. Noting that other authors propose occupational, ecological, and sociocultural definitions, Whitaker (1982) also supports complex, multidimensional definitions” (Rios, 1988).

identification constructed by the community in response to particular historical events, and one that is not unique to Hilltown. As social historian Jenkins notes, there is a, “tendency of small towns, especially in Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic sections of the country, to idealize their pastoral settings, *or even to invent them*, at the very moment when manufacturing began to disrupt an older, agricultural way of life,” (1982:3 – my emphasis). That this self-invented narrative took hold in these communities during industrialization was no accident, as “the rural myth turned out to be useful in several ways. It consoled those whose nerves were frayed by mill whistles and snorting steam engines. [And] it deflected the anger of bone-weary mill workers, or was designed to,” (1982:3). That the self-definition of rurality should regain currency in the aftermath of *deindustrialization* is likewise unsurprising. In this context, the scars left in the physical and ideological landscape by mills and factories are mended through the ideological (re)construction of this place as ‘remembering’ and ‘reclaiming’ its rightful/pure/original/natural identity as a rural space. Regardless of the degree of rurality then, the “rural myth” is used strategically to concretize a community identity. So what does that subjective, experiential and self-constructed category of ‘rurality’ index?

As the search for a definition made clear, while we might not know what rural *is*, we certainly know when we see it, or when we *are* it. In other words, regardless of definitions and quantifications, we operate with a tacit idea and understanding of rurality. If ‘rural’ operates as a ‘floating signifier’ (Levi-Strauss, 1950), it is also tethered at key moments to some very tangible ideas and ideals about what America *is*. For Kathleen Stewart, whose work was done in the foothills of Appalachia, rural and poverty-ridden spaces operate as an ‘other’ America, one that “stands as a kind of back talk to

“America’s” mythic claims to realism, progress, and order,” (1996:3). In the aftermath of deindustrialization in West Virginia, Stewart conceptualized the areas surrounding the abandoned coal-mines (and the people who worked them) as, “a place where the effects of capitalism and modernization pile up on the landscape as the detritus of history,” (1996:4). While this may be a dramatic example (as our cultural imaginings of Appalachia are particularly loaded) it is a useful way of understanding that ‘rural’ (and especially ‘poor and rural’) has come to signify the hostile ‘other’ to a modern progressive America – and the hostility runs both ways.

While rural communities like Hilltown may work to maintain an independent community identity by actively organizing against potential economic trespassers, that desire gets (mis)read and reframed as evidence of the ‘backwardness’ of rural spaces, where the community members themselves become caricatures in the fight against ‘progress’. Indexing both ‘ignorance’ and persistent poverty, rural spaces and their populations provide the conceptual staples to ‘hick’ stories and redneck jokes, the ones told to delineate and determine the ‘appropriate’ (and appropriately *classed*) way of life. As ethnographer Herb Childress notes, working-class folks living in rural areas, “often become icons of squalor when viewed through middle-class and suburban definitions of proper life and proper landscape” (2000:9). What is at stake then, in the moment when the borders of rural communities become porous and face an influx of new people, is not just a contestation over the physical geography upon which they live, but also the very ideologies of life itself.

Indeed, earlier in this chapter I included a segment from my discussion with Remi, a HIKE leader, where he made note of the puzzling – though persistent – tendency

for youth in Hilltown to stay in Hilltown, despite the many educational and cultural resources of neighboring communities. While he attributed this to rural community members' 'strong sense of place', the desire to stay rooted in a familiar physical geography actually revealed a stronger need to stay connected to a particular cultural and ideological geography, and one that potential newcomers to the area would threaten. As Remi explained,

When you're growing up in Hilltown and everyone around you [has this] perspective [which is] very small and locally focused - that can be a real source of richness, but it can also be a constraint. You go up to Hilltown North and you can witness three generations of people being out of work - you can see that impact on a community. And you can see where that's turning and how exciting that is for [some] people in the community...[But] at some point you have to recognize that when you have that repeated reinforcement of a lack of options - regardless of if you [actually or eventually] have options or not - they get turned off.

And when the options are turned off, as this scholar noted, "we begin to live in different worlds". Worlds that seem all the more bounded and secure when there are geographic separations between them, but when the physical boundaries are erased, a number of social, symbolic and technological divides come into play with difficult – if predictable – results. In this community, as Remi stated,

there's a digital divide separating people so that one person cannot conceive that another person cannot search something on the web. And when you cannot conceive of that - that person becomes 'not smart' or 'not able to interact'...[and then] how can you hire someone who doesn't know how to Google something or fill out a spreadsheet or email something? Those options become really narrow, and technology is just one example. That separation is gonna get broader and broader over time.

In his role at HIKE Remi was concerned with how the local educational institutions and social service organizations could help "open those avenues back up", to help people who *wanted* to access new opportunities and – to help everyone (whether or not they wanted to) adjust to these inevitable changes. And indeed, the changes came.

By the time of my research the mythology of Hilltown, which had long served to keep industry out, became a major attraction for the folks from ‘down the interstate’. In the late 1990s and early 2000s the academic and creative economy-based towns of ‘Collegetown’ and ‘Universityville’, a scant 20 miles south of Hilltown, saw a dramatic rise in property values. As a result the real estate market began to ‘price out’ many young academics and artists who now drove up the interstate in the hopes of finding affordable homes. Many of them arrived in Hilltown and discovered a quiet and quaint community they viewed as ripe for growth. Now the creative economy and its members lived side by side with families that had faced generations of unemployment after the closing of various mills and industries which has once been so prevalent in this area. Main Street, once peppered with empty shop windows and ‘mom and pop’ stores began to see a fairly rapid turn over into art galleries and cafes. As the newly imported young, hip and artistic crowd began to claim symbolic and physical space in the streets of Hilltown, their presence was met with a variety of responses that reflected the town’s historic ambivalence towards economic change.

This ambivalence – one based equally upon class as it is rurality – reveals an issue I found to be of crucial to my research. Let me explain. As Betty Rios, author of ‘Rural – A Concept Beyond Definition?’ wrote, “the problem of defining ‘rural’ is not new. *People know when they are rural*, but such perception does not satisfy demographers, policymakers, or educational researchers,” [1988– my emphasis]. The idea that ‘people know when they are rural’ was captivating to me as here was a quantifiable category that seemed to exist in tension with the experiential aspect of this label. So even as invested agencies cut and measured and named places ‘rural’ or ‘not rural’ there was an

understanding that some (or even much) of what was ‘rural’ was not quantifiable, and maybe even *indefinable*. Indeed, in returning to the USDA website, the one concerned with delineating the quantifiable measures of rurality, I found a caveat for the entire endeavor in the introduction where it noted that “[m]any people have definitions for the term rural, but seldom are these rural definitions in agreement. For some, *rural is a subjective state of mind*,” (USDA website - my emphasis).

What does it mean, I wondered, for the federal government to define rurality as a ‘state of mind’, to concede a subjective quality to an ‘objective’ concept? What does this tell us about ‘rural’ as both a geographic place and an ideological concept, both for researchers as well as for the people who inhabit such spaces? And lastly, I wondered, what was all the fuss about: why does it matter if a community is rural or urban? It was Rios who answered this question for me, noting that even though numbers “miss the essence of what it means to be rural, and seldom satisfy those on the receiving end of the definition” (1988) she argues for such work, because, “*After all, difficult policy decisions have to be made and resources have to be allocated on some quantifiable basis*,” [1988 - My emphasis].

In other words, such contestations about rurality are crucial because *the perception, label and general idea of ‘the rural’ translates into structural differences through the allocation of material resources* (i.e. money, services, etc.) to communities given such a designation. Ultimately, in Hilltown, the label of ‘rural’ came to define – in great measure – the political economy of this community, and the policy benefits it would, or would not, receive as a result (a point to which I will return in the conclusion). And so I came to see that ‘all the fuss’ about definitions of rurality evidenced in Hilltown

through the historic – and current – ambivalence towards new transplants into the community, was based upon an anxiety that these newcomers might change [be it through population density, or other geographic measures] not only the self-conceptualization of Hilltown as rural but also the *policy designation* of Hilltown as such.

But for the younger residents of Franklin County, these new residents and their art openings and Sunday jazz brunches radically changed the character of this ‘rural’ community, presenting new social possibilities, economic opportunities, and perhaps most importantly – increased surveillance - for the youth in this once insular community. This context is important to understand in regards to my research project, as I came to see that it was indeed *the label of ‘rural’ – and the post-deindustrialization working-class economic climate of this community – that worked to shape the ways in which ‘adolescence’ – and in particular, queer adolescent sexuality - was experienced by Hilltown youth and intervened upon by the state.* While my literature review on queer youth had found scant information regarding geography and class, I came to find that these were crucial contextual factors in the lives of queer youth in Hilltown, even as they were elided in some research into, and policy work on, this population.

‘What Variables Matter?’: Geography, Class and Sexuality

Any idea that adolescent same-sex sexuality is all the same, or that it has predetermined developmental trajectories and consequences, is belied by the life narratives of contemporary teenagers. Their sexuality is but one facet of an interactive system that makes up their lives. Any presumption that teens have identical developmental pathways because they share a same-sex sexuality or that their sexuality is equally important to various teens’ sense of self is not only implausible, it is a gross misrepresentation of their lives. (Savin-Williams 2005:207)

Our current notions of what variables matter when it comes to sexuality are themselves sharply constrained and constructed by our own social and cultural locations [which blind us] to the full range of factors that might

shape sexual experiences for diverse youth across diverse environments.
(Tolman & Diamond 2001:54)

Drawing from Tolman and Diamond, I contend that one such variable that may ‘matter’ regarding sexuality is geographic location. Indeed, Matthews & Cramer note that in research, the queer population “has remained largely unexplored when located outside of urban areas,” (2008:302) and that “[s]tudy samples of GLBT persons have tended to lack diversity in terms of race/ethnicity, country of origin, socioeconomic class, and geographic locale” (ibid.).¹⁴ Yet as other scholars point out, exploration of queer youth experiences from a range of geographic locations is crucial to explore because this context may shape their experiences in a number of important ways.

Galliher, Rostosky and Hughes posit the absence of rural youth in queer scholarship as problematic given that “rural, urban, and suburban communities likely differ from one another in terms of economic, leisure, and social opportunities, access to mental health care and other services, and *in the values and norms that are transmitted to youth*,” (2004:236 - my emphasis). It is the last, italicized part of this quote which captured my attention as a cultural anthropologist. For it’s one thing to assume that rural youth may be more isolated from resources, support and capital than their urban counterparts, but it’s something else entirely to posit that such youth are enrolled into distinct ideologies and are differently socialized *because of their geographic location*.

As explained by anthropologist Kath Weston, “the gay imaginary is spatialized...The result is a sexual geography in which the city represents a beacon of tolerance and gay community, the country a locus of persecution and gay absence,”

¹⁴ This is in line with the findings of other researchers (see for instance, Meezan & Rauch, 2005 and Sullivan & Losberg, 2003).

(1998:40). Indeed, the city/country - or urban/rural – dichotomy is central in what Weston terms the ‘Great Gay Migration’ where she notes that most exodus narratives of queers who moved from the country to the city utilize an image of the rural as “the space of dead-end lives, oppression and surveillance,” (1998:44). In fact in the above mentioned study, Galliher, Rostosky and Hughes posit that the different ‘values and norms’ presented to youth in rural areas may cause them to suffer from “poorer psychosocial adjustment” (2004:237).¹⁵ Notably, a recent ethnographic exploration of rural queer youth found this presumed linkage of rurality with poor adjustment to have no empirical merit.

Mary L. Gray’s dissertation research on queer youth in the rural South found that youth “assert[ed] their presence in fabulously conspicuous ways,” (2004:16) especially by their use of media technologies through which they reconfigured and reclaimed rural spaces. Importantly, Gray notes that ethnographic explorations of rural sexuality help us break away from “a de facto reliance on urban paradigms,” (2004:8) where rural queer youth are imagined to be “alienated gendered/sexual subjects who seek....connection to a culture that exists in an urban elsewhere” (2004:1). For Gray this problematic conceptualization depends on a reading of ‘urban’ as modern, “dynamic, forward-thinking, brimming with potential,” (2004:7) in contrast to a “rural (other) that is static, traditional, and inadequate” (2004:7).

At the same time that Gray notes that “the stories told of rural sexualities...tend to tell the tale of repression in the face of tradition and conservatism that oversimplifies a

¹⁵ Note the use of the word *poorer* here – as it indexes *measurement*, that there is a norm against which this group is compared (and indeed, often constituted as a group – as picked up in the following chapter).

far more complicated picture,” (2004:7) she points out that researchers may need to strategically utilize the cultural imaginings of rural queer youth as experiencing “disproportionately horrific abuse and threat their urban peers [do] not,” (2004:60) in order to receive Institutional Review Board approval for their projects. As explored below, this is an imperative similar to that faced by community-based organizations that must conceptualize queer youth in particular ways in order to receive public health funds. As this may be especially the case for organizations in low-income communities dependent on securing outside funding, it is imperative to explore the impacts of not only a rural geographic environment - but also a particular class location – for queer youth and the programs policy-makers create to ‘assist’ them.

Indeed, attending to class in explorations of rural sexuality is crucial given the cultural connotations of geography where ‘suburban’ tends to code for white, middle or upper-middle class, ‘rural’ tends to code for white poverty, and ‘urban’ reads primarily as poor and of-color (see i.e. Kobayashi & Peake, 2000). In this cultural discourse, as Julie Bettie notes,

white is middle-class is suburban; black is lower-class is urban. But a slippage occurs in which class references are dropped out, and white stands in for middle, where black stands in for lower, or suburban stands in for white and urban for black. [2003:47]

The tacit connections between race and class produced in these geographical codings are, in fact, part and parcel of a culture where class discourse is largely absent. As Bettie explains, “discourses on gender and race...have offered sites on which class issues are articulated in other terms and have helped sustain the long-standing ideological representation of the United States as a classless society” (2003:48). Indeed, the lack of an explicit discourse about class creates a situation where discussions of class are

displaced onto geography and other domains like race, gender and importantly, *sexuality* (Ortner, 1991).

For Ortner, sexuality and (working) class identities intersect in interesting ways in our cultural field of vision, as working-class sexuality has long been an object of scrutiny whereby “the working-class is cast as the bearer of an exaggerated sexuality, against which middle-class respectability is defined,” (1991:177). Ortner argues this may be especially the case with adolescents for whom, “one of the key dimensions of [class] difference is a supposed difference in attitudes toward and practices of sexual behavior. Middle-class kids, both male and female, define working-class kids as promiscuous, highly experienced, and sexually unconstrained,” (1991:178). Given these cultural connotations of class and sexuality it may seem surprising that class is not often considered an important analytic variable in explorations of sexuality for youth or adults.¹⁶ Yet the invisibility of class issues in research on adolescent sexuality is inevitably tied to the larger cultural frameworks that minimize or erase discussions of class (Ortner, 1991).

So why are these stereotypes about geography and class important for understanding adolescent sexuality? Because, as I will argue, these ‘common sense’/cultural ideas about rurality and the working-class may tacitly yet implicitly serve as the foundation for policy makers and ‘the state’ which interacts, intersects with and often *intervenes* upon adolescents through a variety of institutions that serve to regulate

¹⁶ When research on this population does include class it does so overwhelmingly through a focus on middle-class and upper-middle-class consumption processes (Maskovsky, 2002) which ignores working-class and poverty level community members, with few notable exceptions (Kennedy and Davis, 1993; Knopp, 1997; Weston & Rofel, 1997).

and socialize youth into productive citizens. Thus we need to move beyond these stereotypes to actual empirical studies of queer youth and their interactions with the state. As a Councilor on the COMA board I came to learn that the ‘state’ interacts with queer youth primarily in two sites: either in an educational setting through a school-based Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) or in a community-based organization (CBO) through a ‘neighborhood’ queer youth group. GSAs and CBOs are both state funded, however, as I’ll explain in the following section, they are financially and ideologically tied to the state in two very different ways.

Policing and Policy(ing) Sexuality: Rights Versus Risks

In Massachusetts, community-based queer youth groups are funded primarily through the Department of Public Health (DPH). In order to receive DPH funding, community-based organizations produce grant applications that prioritize a conceptualization of queer youth as ‘at risk’ for a variety of public health concerns, and illustrate the ‘need’ for risk intervention services in their community. When successful, these community-based programs receive not only financial support, but also mandatory DPH curricula which likewise prioritize *intervening* upon queer youths’ risky behaviors.

Gay Straight Alliances, on the other hand, are funded not through the Department of Public Health but rather through the Department of Education’s (now defunct) Safe Schools Program, which prioritizes not the risks but the *rights* of queer youth who, in Massachusetts, are protected by the Gay and Lesbian Students’ Rights Law (Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 76, Section 5).¹⁷ The DOE’s conceptualization

¹⁷ “No person shall be excluded from or discriminated against in admission to a public school of any town, or in obtaining the advantages, privileges and courses of study of

of queer youth trades public health discourses for legal and political ones and thus the educationally based GSAs are not only less financially tied to ‘at risk’ funding streams, they are indeed less *ideologically* linked to public health conceptualizations of queer youth as ‘at risk’. This disjuncture may have significance as different groups of queer youth are being inscribed into these various discourses in differential ways. Originally, I understood these differences to be based primarily on geographic location.

Indeed, I had found that in Massachusetts community-based queer youth programming projects (such as SMAK), tend to be found primarily in urban and working-class neighborhoods, while Gay Straight Alliances were more typically found in middle-class suburban high schools (Johnson 2007).

Yet while SMAK was the only CBO queer youth group in Franklin County, a few of the high schools *did* have GSAs. In particular, the Hilltown Vocational High School had the oldest GSA in all of Franklin County: thus, here at least, the correlation of GSAs with the suburban middle-class high school was not the case. As I will explain, I conducted research in both SMAK and the GSA (in addition to a third ‘site’, addressed later) in order to explore how youth interacted with these two groups which are financially and ideologically tied to the state in two very different ways.

Paying attention to this disjuncture and to the effects of funding and curriculum frameworks in queer youth programs is important because, as Talburt notes, “youth who are not comprehensible within the terms of identity constructed by discourses of risk and counter discourses of positive development may be excluded from interventions designed for them,” (2004: 120). However, in pre-constituted groups like SMAK or the GSA, the

such public school on account of race, color, sex, religion, national origin or sexual orientation,” (Massachusetts’ General Laws 76:5).

youth are not those ‘excluded’ individuals Talburt warns us of, rather they are in some ways ‘self-selected’, as they had chosen to be part of one of these groups. As I would come to find out early on in my fieldwork, however, there were a number of youth in Hilltown who actively refused to be part of either of these organizations. This (self) exclusion from SMAK and the GSA translates into an exclusion from research projects with this population, which then limits policy makers ideas about queer youth. Before exploring this third group, however, I pause here to give an introduction to my two original research sites: the community-based queer youth group SMAK and the educationally based GSA at Hilltown Vocational High School. While they are two unique places they are both ‘institutions of adolescence’ that together comprise the primary architecture of assistance for working-class youth in this community.

In the original conceptualization of this research project - which would cull participants from both SMAK and the GSA at the Vocational School – I sought to explore how queer youth in Hilltown interacted with the discourse of risk and the discourse of rights in these different settings. Given that “meanings circulate within a given culture at any point in time, and it is those meanings which offer people...versions of who they are,” (Frost 2003:125), I wanted to investigate how these youth conceptualized and experienced their sexual identities in, through, or in spite of, the discourses about queer sexuality they interacted with at SMAK or the GSA.

In particular, I wanted to explore if the differences I had seen in academic and policy conceptualizations of queer youth versus the youth I knew in Hilltown had to do with class and geography, as I had posited. Having witnessed the plethora of survey and statistical inquires into queer youth lives, I sought to use ethnographic research which I

viewed as “particularly suited to analyzing how ideologies infiltrate the institutions and practices of everyday life,” (Shore & Wright, 1997:24) and as offering one of the more promising methodologies for exploring the possible disjunctures between academic and policy conceptualizations of queer youth and their lived experiences.

Moreover, I sought to make my work participatory, collaborating with the youth who are so often the topic of social policy, but who are rarely included in such discussions. Such an approach is crucial, especially in regards to poor and working-class youth, as Fine and Weis note, “while much of contemporary social policy is designed to ‘fix’ these young people, they have much to say back to policymakers and the rest of America” (1998:1). Working collaboratively with this population of youth was something I saw as a vital intervention. Indeed, it was the use of ethnography to attend to the lives of rural working-class youth and “tell the stories from the side of policy that is never asked to speak; to interrupt the hegemony of elite voices dictating what is ‘good for them’,” (Fine & Weis, 1998:285) which I conceptualized as central to my project. While the importance of this type of collaboration is taken up in Chapter 3, let me pause now and return to the field – to (what I thought would be) my first research site.

Site 1: SMAK (And Why I Didn’t Conduct Research There)

As first a volunteer and then later a co-leader of SMAK I had various responsibilities and roles; I helped lead our weekly meetings, served as the advisor to the Peer Steering Committee (which put the youth in charge of fieldtrips and fundraising events), and after witnessing the dearth of higher educational resources I also organized a college component that would ultimately bring many Hilltown youth on their first trips to college campuses in both Boston and New York City. On these long bus trips and hotel

overnights the youth and I had many intense conversations about life and love and dreams for the future. But the trust that allowed youth to share with me in these more personal moments was one that was built slowly, and borne out of the more routine interactions in our weekly meetings at SMAK, described below.

In the first hour or so of our weekly meetings I listened and participated in ‘check ins’ where we all shared some of the happenings of our lives with the group. Then we would disband and for the second hour the youth, myself, and the other adult advisor would (loosely) ‘run’ a host of activities – sometimes this was a pool game, sometimes this meant smaller group discussions, one-on-one ‘counseling’, art projects, surfing the internet, and raiding the kitchen. Other times we watched movies, played games, or did anonymous question and answer sessions where youth could write down questions they may be too embarrassed to ask out loud (though the point of these, I soon found out, was equally about embarrassing the adults as it was an honest search for information). We also had mandatory ‘programming’ from our state funding agencies that we had to implement regularly – like safer sex discussions and anti-bullying workshops – which the youth sometimes engaged with actively and at other times waited patiently through until we were done and we could get on with the more important ‘business of hanging out’.

Through both these weekly meetings and our fieldtrips out of town, I came to know a small cohort of Hilltown youth very well during my two-year stint at SMAK. These relationships took time to build, and were hemmed in by the rules and protocol of the organization – for instance, guidelines that barred adult-youth contact outside of the group, limited the ‘personal information’ adults could share with youth, and made adults ‘mandatory reporters’ – policies that while ostensibly meant to protect the youth in reality

served to protect the organization itself. As I would come to find out, they would also prove fatal to the kind of research project I wanted to do – one which was relationship-based, would entail lots of participant-observation (i.e. ‘hanging out’) outside of the group, and one where youth could feel free to speak openly without fear that the details of their lives would be shared with those higher up in the organization. While I had initially been granted permission by the SMAK director to conduct my research within the group, it was a confrontation regarding the structures of SMAK (described below) that ultimately led me to withdraw my request, and to leave the organization prior to conducting my project.

Like many community-based groups SMAK was just one program offered by a larger governing organization – in this case Hilltown Youth Services, which itself was one arm of another even larger governing organization – Hilltown Community Endeavors – which operated as a non-profit ‘501C3’ association.¹⁸ The architecture of this organization meant that there was several layers of ‘government’; SMAK and its’ Advisors (myself and one other adult) had to answer to the Director of Hilltown Youth Services, who in turn had to answer to Hilltown Community Endeavors’ Board of Directors. Because each of these governing organizations were state and grant supported, there was regular ‘reporting’; at the end of every weekly meeting, after the youth had left and the pizza boxes had been recycled, myself and the other adult advisor would fill out bubble sheets delineating the number of youth ‘served’, the types of outreach and prevention done, and the programming implemented. Additionally, at least once each

¹⁸ This tax classification allowed SMAK, like many of the groups operated by HCE and HYS, to supplement their state funding with grants from both private and public institutions.

funding cycle, the youth were given both quantitative and qualitative questionnaires from our 'parent' organizations. So while SMAK seemed to function as an autonomous unit, in actuality it was caught up within several larger structures that operated as a 'pyramid of power' where SMAK was on the bottom. Most often this pyramid was invisible, but at other times SMAK members – both the adults and the youth – became acutely aware of our position of dependence and our lack of power within this architecture of assistance.

I experienced this first hand one day when I was called into the office of the Hilltown Youth Services Director. The Director informed myself and the other adult advisor that she had been called to task by her supervisors at Hilltown Community Endeavors regarding some 'problematic' responses on one of the regular institution-wide surveys: at issue was (what I determined to be joking) remarks about violence made by a SMAK youth. The comments were 'caught' by one Hilltown Community Endeavors administrator, who forwarded the comments onto the Director of Hilltown Youth Services who in turn forwarded the information onto us, the SMAK coordinators. While the youth had not listed their names on these 'anonymous' surveys, they had been asked a number of 'routine' questions – i.e. their gender, age, and residential location -that were ultimately used as identifying information. The concerned administrator forwarded us not only the 'problem' comments but also the answers to these routine questions – which in a small group provided enough information to positively identify the participant.

This issue sparked a great debate among myself, the other coordinator and the Hilltown Youth Services Director, where I took issue with the Directors' desire to confront the youth because I contended that the youth had filled out the survey with the assumption of confidentiality, which we would in effect be breaking by identifying and

confronting the youth. The Director challenged that idea and claimed that since this was an organizational survey the youth knew that ‘confidentiality’ in this instance meant that the information could be, and indeed *would be*, shared within the organization (which of course assumed that the youth understood the architecture of the organization – something I didn’t believe was true). Secondly, and more important in her mind, she contended that any statements regarding violence effectively trumped confidentiality rights. In this instance the confidentiality issue was ‘solved’ by 1) my contention that this youth was making jokes very much in line with his character and that he did not pose any real threat and 2) the negotiations between myself and the Director. In these negotiations I ultimately ‘agreed’ upon her definitions of confidentiality and the instances about when this confidentiality was nullified (i.e. when the youth made statements which could be read as a threat to him/herself and/or the other youth participants) and she in turn accepted my proposal that this definition of confidentiality and its nullification would be made explicit to every youth whenever they participated in (so-called) ‘anonymous’ survey research.

This story illuminates just some of the issues raised in conducting research within an organization, and for me, it was a huge flashing red ‘warning’ sign. Combined with my prior hesitancy regarding the relationship limitations imposed by SMAK, it was enough for me to pack my bags – and my research plan. But before I left I did a workshop for the SMAK youth where I presented my research proposal to them and passed around a sign up sheet for interested participants. I left with a full list of names and numbers and not a clue about how to proceed. But proceed I did – with my co-researcher Birdie’s help – outside the walls of SMAK, which turned out to not be a literal

site of the research but rather a metaphorical ‘site’ *from* which we culled research participants and *at* which our relationships – to each other and to those we would interview – were formed. We followed the SMAK youth into two sites: the high school and the street. I begin with a discussion of the high school.

Site 2: Why I Went Back to High School

Teenagers live in much more proximate contact with institutions, because kids don’t have the resources that allow adults to cushion the blow. Every place they use is owned by someone else. They cannot build places. They cannot purchase places. They typically cannot modify places. They can only inhabit places, which means being subject to someone else’s rules. They feel the curfew, they feel the closing time at the beach or the no-loitering laws at the convenience store, they feel the capriciousness of the bells that tell them when and where to move through their days at school. (Childress, 2000:270)

In America, the “high school” is a *literal place – a compulsory institution* in which almost every teenager is enrolled, with few exceptions, for at least some period of time.¹⁹ But the high school is also a *figurative space – a symbolic institution* through which teenagers are enrolled into both their social identities and roles. Thus the high school is not only the primary institution *for* adolescents, but is also one of the primary institutions *of* adolescence – those establishments that both create and constitute adolescence as an identity and category, and are also charged with the socialization and surveillance of this population. Indeed, the high school is an excellent example of what the French philosopher Louis Althusser termed ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ – the institutions which “act to integrate individuals into the existing economic system by subjecting them to the hegemony of a dominant ideology, a set of ideas and values which ultimately

¹⁹ Given that mandatory education does not cease until sophomore year (at the earliest), almost every youth in our culture will spend some part of their adolescence in a high school.

supports the dominance of the capitalist class” (Bullock et al 1999:25). The high school thus enrolls youth into hegemonic systems through the transmission of dominant ideologies and their socialization into identities like gender, race, class and sexuality.

Perhaps more crucially, the high school is also charged with preparing youth for their futures as adults, in particular by socializing them into their future roles in the workforce. As Paul Willis established in his seminal study about how and ‘why working-class kids get working-class jobs’ (the subtitle to *Learning to Labour*, 1977), the high school is an important site of class reproduction. Given the socializing function of the high school, and its cultural significance (both literal and symbolic) any investigation into the lives of school-aged youth must take into account – and take account of - this important site. While we must address the high school, however, we must guard against taking an homogenizing approach, and not assume either a universal structure to, or common experience of, this institution. Indeed, the high school may take a variety of different forms, as evidenced in the landscape of educational options in and around Hilltown.

While a detailed description of each local high school is beyond the scope of this introduction, it is important to note that there are three general educational options for high-school aged youth in this area. The first is the traditional academic high school; the public institution with a college-preparatory curriculum, of which there were four locally – Hilltown North, Hilltown South, Eagle Ridge and Franklin Regional High Schools. Then there is the second option - ‘homeschooling’ - and to my initial surprise I found that many Hilltown youth were homeschoolers, including Birdie, my youth co-researcher. The third educational option is what I term the ‘choice track’ –public schools that

students apply for admission into, and which are characterized by having a particular curricular focus beyond traditional academics. During my time in Hilltown there were three main options in the choice track: The School for Performing Arts (SPA), Students Engaged in Learning Fundamentals (SELF) and Hilltown Vocational High School. Both SPA, which focused on arts education, and SELF, which was a self-guided ‘transitional’ school for homeschooled youth – were not located in Hilltown or Franklin County, but in the neighboring county to the south. With both schools located approximately a thirty-five minute drive away, students who opted for these schools must have their own transportation, and those who chose to attend SELF must also pay tuition (though it was on a sliding-scale, and no youth was turned away for inability to pay; SPA on the other hand was free). The remaining ‘choice track’ school, and the only one in Franklin County, was Hilltown Vocational High School, a technical school, it was also the one I chose as my high school research site.

While it’s sometimes difficult to clarify or tease out the often complex reasons why an ethnographer may chose a given field site, in my case there were three identifiable things that brought me to Hilltown Vocational High School (or simply ‘the Voc’ as it was known around town, and as I will refer to it throughout the dissertation). First, the Voc had one of the oldest Gay Straight Alliances (or GSAs) in the county and through my work at SMAK - the local community-based queer youth group - I had already become acquainted with Crey, the GSA advisor at the Voc. Secondly, during my time at SMAK I had witnessed a number of youth who faced emotional and physical harassment due to homophobia at another local high school transfer to the Voc and find respite and relief in what was repeatedly described to me as a “very gay-friendly, very

welcoming community”. Third, but perhaps most importantly, Mack - one of the SMAK youth I had known for a long time and with whom I had grown very close - was about to enter her senior year at the Voc. She was the GSA president, the star of the softball team, and one of the most popular students in the school (among teachers and students alike) – in short, she was the best ‘hall pass’ an anthropologist could hope for.

So, given these reasonings, the Voc made sense as my high school research site, but because it is also not the ‘average’ (read: academics-only) high school there are some key things for me to address about how vocational education works. But what is important for me to explain here - in the introduction to the dissertation - is not the ‘how’ but the ‘why’; why is the vocational high school a reasonable site in which to explore how a group of rural and working-class teenagers experience the intersections of class, sexuality and rurality? First and foremost, the vocational school is a form of education traditionally associated with the working-class (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), and such historical linkages are not random, indeed they suggest that there is some important ‘class work’ afoot in these institutions.

Secondly, my approach to class as not simply a socioeconomic category but rather *a subjectivity produced in and through ideological and material structures* means that I must explore “what it is like to live the specificities of classed location at a particular time and in a particular place,” (Walkerdine et al. 2001:13).²⁰ Thus the Voc is an interesting site given the larger socioeconomic context of Hilltown as a community whose deindustrialization has radically changed the local employment opportunities. This must be taken into account, for as Bettie notes, “[i]f we refuse to essentialize class and

²⁰ For two exemplary treatises on subjectivities of class see Sennett & Cobb, 1993 and Bettie, 2003.

instead focus on class as a formation, not an invariant structure but a dynamic historical process, then the changing demographics of labor [and I would add, the changing labor options] must be – and can be – taken into account,” (2003:197 – bracket comments mine). Thus I’ll spend some time exploring the school in the context of deindustrialization, exploring how class subjectivities and life options are produced within ideological and material structures at a particular historic moment. I argue that in this context, vocational education is a smart alternative to traditional high school, and that students’ decision to enroll there may actually reveal an acute class awareness, and may also be a key mechanism in the production of a working-class subjectivity.

But as there is no one, homogenous, ‘working-class’ there is likewise no one ‘working-class subjectivity’ – and I caution against such an essentializing idea (even as I am continually confronted by it in everyday discourse). Instead, I draw from a rich legacy of scholars who take essentialized class identities to task – especially ethnographers such as Bettie (2003) and Chin (2001) whose excellent works explore the variety of class(ed) identities and subjectivities.²¹ In this tradition, I attempt to sketch the contours of the *particular kinds of working-class subjectivities produced in and through the Voc school*, especially in terms of how they relate to, and ‘play out’ through, gender and sexual practices and identities. I identify these working-class subjectivities as being rooted in ‘work’ as both a practice and an ideology. Indeed, I contend that the Voc puts the ‘work’ in working-class by enrolling students into the working world while still in high school. While some (middle-class, suburban) traditional high schools also attempt this fusion through, for instance, school sponsored internships – at the Voc enrollment

²¹ Their work is described in more detail in Chapter 3.

into the world of work happens within the high school curriculum, via skill-based training and specialization.

As I'll illustrate, such specialization is a protective measure in a deindustrialized economy, a 'smart choice' for the working-class kids whose parents' working-class jobs are no longer available. Additionally, this specialization is both drawn from – and itself reinforces – divisions within class fragments that demarcates different segments of the working-class both in terms of actual occupations (hierarchical and role-based) as well as moral character (i.e. the 'deserving' poor versus the 'bad' poor). The existence of such loaded class fragments reveals the layers of class complexity and creates a less essentialized, more nuanced understanding of class subjectivities. Paying attention to these internal class divisions at the school itself grounds my understanding of (working) class subjectivities as heterogenous and polyvocal. Indeed, unlike traditional high schools where youth are conceptualized primarily as students, I argue that the Voc socializes youth into a unique and specifically classed subjectivity, that of the 'student-worker'.

Further I contend that as the vocational school turns youth into 'student-workers', it also socializes them into role-relevant identities – especially gender and sexuality - in ways that are not only distinctly classed but also inherently tied to this rural geographic location. I'll tackle the stereotypes that see working-class rural communities as having more 'traditional' (read: outdated) views on gender, views which are conceptualized as being rooted in a 'rigid division of labor'. Taking the context of deindustrialization into account, I'll explore the consequences of a changing labor market on gender roles writ-large, but in particular on Voc 'student-workers' enrolled in a gender-challenging

vocational system. Indeed, as the vocational school socializes youth into the world of work they simultaneously socialize them into a gendered division of labor, but as I'll explore, here - in the aftermath of deindustrialization in this rural and working-class community – it is a *differently gendered* division of labor.

I'll explore the effects of this context on the gender and sexual climate of the Voc, a climate, I'll argue, that *simultaneously produces both transgressive possibilities as well as pervasive anxieties*. Indeed, these anxieties permeate the school, threatening to explode under the right set of circumstances, and as I'll illustrate, during my time at the Voc I witnessed the 'perfect storm' of events lead up to once such explosion, regarding – of all things – a t-shirt. But in the response to the incident a host of complicated issues, competing ideologies and tacit assumptions about gender and sexuality rose to the surface. "T-Shirtgate", it turns out, would be what allowed me to explore the high school, and the diverse group of students and teachers who came together in this site, with a far more nuanced understanding of 'safety' 'support' and 'tolerance' than that which is propagated at the policy-making level. And it is the rural and working-class context, the geographic and symbolic location of the high school, which would force me to challenge the ideologies I had brought with me on my first day of school at the Voc – policy understandings and theoretical frameworks packed so neatly and worn like a backpack across my shoulders, weighing me down like a ton of bricks. It was also the youth who were missing from the GSA that would lead Birdie and I to undertake research in a third 'site', unexpected when this project began.

Site 3: The Street

Studies on teenagers suggest that the space of the street is often the only autonomous space that young people are able to carve out for themselves and that hanging around, and larking about, on the streets, in parks and in shopping malls, is one form of youth resistance...to adult power (Corrigan, 1979). However, other work has shown that teenagers on the street are considered by adults to be a polluting presence – a potential threat to public order (Baumgartner, 1988; Cahill, 1990) – and thus that they are often subject to various adult regulatory regimes including various forms of surveillance and temporal and spatial curfews. [Ruddick 1998:7]

While I had come to know many Hilltown youth through their participation in either the GSA or SMAK, there were many other youth in Hilltown who were not a part of either group. I would see them everywhere on the streets of Hilltown, and at the beginning of my research, they could almost always be found on Main Street - standing or sitting in front of The Café. On that small stretch of sidewalk, regardless of the time of day, I could always find one or two (or ten or twenty) youth there getting their caffeine fix, meeting friends, or just hanging out. Often times Birdie would be among them, as this was her group of friends, the people she referred to as ‘The Crew’. This group presented an interesting paradox – for despite their ubiquitous presence on the streets of Hilltown they were strikingly absent from nearly all of the ‘institutions of adolescence’ in this community; they were not to be found in the halls of the Voc, or any of Hilltown’s other high schools, nor did they partake in SMAK or any other community-based youth groups. In this sense they were what researchers and policy makers refer to as a ‘hidden population’.

The term ‘hidden population’ is not to be taken as a literal label, as it does not generally denote a group that is hidden from view. Rather, in most cases, when researchers or policy makers label a population as ‘hidden’ what they actually mean is

inaccessible: inaccessible to the state, to researchers, to program and policies – in short, inaccessible to ‘outsiders’. This is an important distinction, as often hidden populations are actually quite visible – making their impenetrability by outsiders all the more frustrating. This was the case with the Crew as well. While the Crew was the most visible group of youth in Hilltown, they were also a hidden population – as individuals who had dropped out of school or opted out of the myriad social service community programs, ‘the state’ had no point of entry to this group, and neither did the myriad researchers who came through town. At first, neither did I. This is not only an intentional aspect of the hidden population, it is also a well-documented issue for policy-makers and academics attempting to gain access into them. As social workers John Matthews and Elizabeth Cramer note in their article on the use of technology in qualitative research on hidden populations,

[i]dentifying and recruiting hard to reach populations for research studies is a challenge for researchers...Hard to reach or hidden populations may be involved in illegal behavior...or persons who are stigmatized in society...These populations may be difficult to find because they may be wary of accessing traditional service providers; thus agency-based or community-based recruitment efforts may not access them. (2008:301)

These authors identify gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and queer individuals as members of ‘hidden populations’ who may opt-out of state or community-based services and programs.²²

Indeed, through both SMAK and the GSA I had come to know many of the queer and ally youth of Hilltown, but I also heard about many youth who resisted or refused to participate in these groups, like the members of the Crew. As I would come to find out,

²² Though they concede that “changes in attitudes towards gays and lesbians have made this a population that is easier to reach,” (2008:301).

some of these youth had ‘queer’ experiences. As Matthews and Cramer explain in their discussion of research within an often hidden queer population,

One such challenge is defining who exactly the population is. For example, in GLBT research, persons may be defined according to attraction...sexual behavior, and/or sexual identity. Additionally, the language they use to self-identify...may vary greatly due to such factors as racial, cultural or ethnic group, age cohort or political affiliation. Thus, when researchers choose a certain language in their study advertisements, they are signaling how they are defining a population of persons, which may then exclude others who do not view themselves as being a part of how that population is being defined. (2008:302-303)

By choosing to work within the structures of SMAK and the GSA, I had actively – if unknowingly – excluded people from my research because I was operating with a set of implicit ideas and a limited definition of who comprised the queer youth ‘population’. While these organizations provided me with the ‘ready made pool of research subjects’ Ritch Savin-Williams notes is an identifying characteristic of queer youth groups, it had also blinded me to the range of queer youth in this community. For beyond the walls of SMAK and the GSA were other youth who were behaviorally ‘queer’ (in terms of same-sex sexuality) or were politically ‘queer’ – that is, critical of heteronormativity and marginal to hegemonic sexuality in practice or in belief. But the question was how to get access to this group, how to gain entrée into the Crew. If they weren’t coming to SMAK, how would I include them in this research? I could see them – but I had no way to engage with this ‘hidden population’. This was, I soon found out, a common question and a common ‘problem’.

Indeed, as Griffiths et al note, “[r]esearch into hidden populations is not new. Researchers have employed a wide range of techniques to collect data on populations for which no easily accessible sampling frame exists,” (1993:1618). From debates over the

merits and limitations of ‘snowball sampling’ (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Biemacki & Waldorf, 1991; van Meter, 1990) to the disputes about increased usage of technology and the internet (Deren & Baumann, 2002; Fernandez et. al, 2004; Matthews & Cramer, 2008) there is no shortage of discussions regarding how best to address the methodological challenges issued by these hidden populations. Interestingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, ethnographic methods have increasingly been touted as offering some of the best potential ‘solutions’ to the hidden population ‘problem’ (Griffiths et al, 1993; Sifaneck & Neaigus, 2001; Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). This is due, in no small part, to the emphasis on the construction of personal relationships necessary for not only good ethnography in general but also for exploration into groups characterized as having a high level of distrust of outsiders (often for good reason, as I would come to find out). Thus, in research into hidden populations, “often these [methodological] developments have come from ethnographers who, in their attempts to see the world through the eyes of their study group, spend many hours gaining the trust and acceptance of their subjects,” (Griffiths et al, 1993:1618).

Both Griffiths et al (1993) and Atkinson & Flint (2001) cite some of the earliest ethnographic research into subcultures produced by the Chicago School (for instance Becker, 1963 and Whyte, 1955) as constructing a legacy of gaining access to, and the *trust of*, individuals (such as drug users or gang members) who had good reason to ‘hide’. This ethnographic approach to studying hidden populations is characterized by Griffiths et al. as “time consuming and labour-intensive,” (1993:1618) but also critical if the researcher is to earn “the trust of the study population to gain access for interviewing and observation,” (ibid.). This often means gaining some level of ‘insider’ status, for,

“[r]esearchers who are perceived to be ‘outsiders’ to the community may find it particularly challenging to find persons who are willing to be included in their studies,” (Matthews & Cramer, 2008:303). Because of this insider/outsider division, and the often fierce policing of it by members of hidden populations, Matthews & Cramer note that “[s]ome researchers have found that partnering with local and trusted persons in the community, who then serve as co-researchers and contextual interpreters, provides for easier access to hard to reach populations,” (ibid.). Luckily – that’s exactly what I had in Birdie, my co-researcher, my lifeboat and my passport into a group that many see, but who – for all intents and purposes – remain ‘hidden’, intentionally off the map, and off the radar of the state.

As an insider to ‘the Crew’, Birdie could have been ‘used’ for the snowballing method so prevalent in hidden population research, where “one subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on,” (Vogt, 1999). As Atkinson & Flint note,

the main value of snowball sampling is as a method for obtaining respondents where they are few in number or where some degree of trust is required to initiate contact. Under these circumstances, techniques of ‘chain referral’ may imbue the researcher with characteristics associated with being an insider or group member and this can aid entry to settings where conventional approaches find difficult to succeed. (2001:2)

Useful as it can be, researchers note that such a method is not without its problems. One key ‘problem’ identified by researchers utilizing this technique is that “snowball samples will be biased towards the inclusion of individuals with interrelationships” (Atkinson & Flint, 2001:3) – but this was not something I was particularly concerned with, as I was not looking for a representative ‘sample’ of youth in general. Rather, I was interested in this group in particular, which Birdie was naturally a part of, so her ‘interrelationships’

were not a hindrance but rather an asset. And because Birdie was herself a researcher, I wasn't looking for her to give me names and referrals (as central to a snowball methodology), but rather she would use her existing social network to conduct her own interviews. In this way she was more of what Griffiths et al refer to as a 'Privileged Access Interviewer' (1993:1619) – someone who could use her own position and 'privileged access' into the group to benefit the research project.

With Birdie's help I was given unprecedented access to this group, and while it was methodologically incredible, it was analytically paralyzing. For the more I came to understand the lifeworlds of this population, I began to understand why they did not participate in the GSA, SMAK or other services, and I slowly came to several important realizations that would radically alter my ideas about youth, class and sexuality. Indeed, the young members of the Crew were labeled by many in their community as 'disaffected', a term which denotes, "...disengagement, disenfranchisement, disillusionment, disenchantment or exclusion from the mainstream" (EDAW, 1998; p14 – cited in ESF Objective 3, Paper 9:1). Indeed, they were seen and described to me at times as 'hippies', 'drug addicts', 'gutter punks' and 'nuisances'. Their stylistic markers – bandannas, piercings, dreadlocks and tattoos – were read differently by different community members, indeed, even I ascribed them certain identities because of their 'presentation'. Yet regardless of what particular term they were labeled (and it was always a variation on the same theme), it soon became clear to me that some community members (especially the local business owners) were actively concerned with trying to rid Hilltown of '*that* group of people' – the ones who made the space in front of The Café their unofficial meeting ground.

Yet in our research with the Crew, Birdie and I found that their ‘resentment’ and ‘disillusionment’ (which characterizes ‘disaffected youth’) was not only well founded, but also served several important functions for the cohesiveness of the group as a whole. As I will illustrate, the ‘disaffection’ that the state’s policy makers attempt to undo through social services is not only a characteristic effect of economic disenfranchisement, but is in reality *largely determined by youth’s prior negative experiences with - and early enrollment into - programs of the state*. In other words, and as we will illustrate, the state was attempting to change a subjectivity that it had itself produced and fostered in its young citizens.

Towards a Dissertation

What follows in the forthcoming chapters is a mapping of contemporary adolescence and an explanation of the challenges issued to both our cultural mythology and our academic understandings of youth and sexuality by exploring the lives of queer youth coming of age in the geographic and economic margins. Yet as Ritch Savin-Williams notes, “to understand same-sex-oriented teens we must first understand adolescence in general. Too frequently our investigations ignore the vast theoretical and empirical literature on adolescence in favor of methodologically flawed gay research,” (2005:217-218). Understanding the historical legacy of such research on adolescence writ large is central to understanding work on queer youth in particular. Thus I begin, in Chapter Two, by tackling the academic research conducted on adolescence in various disciplines over the last century, tracing the push and pull between the ‘nature’ and ‘nurture’ debate about - and the major theoretical paradigms used to glean insight into - this lifestage.

Chapter Three introduces the major interventions into academic conceptualizations about adolescence as both an arena of expertise (by the Foucauldian scholars involved in what I term Critical Youth Studies), and a lived-in subject position (by anthropologists producing deep ethnographic accounts of youth coming of age in different contexts). Working off the idea that, “the history of youth cultural studies of the last four decades tells us more about the politics of academic research than it does about young people” (Ruddick, 1998:21), this chapter traces those politics and concludes with a discussion of ethnographic methodologies as offering the most promising tool in the study of youth and youth cultures, and explores the increasing use of *collaborative* ethnographic exploration and *participatory* research projects to disrupt traditional research which has generally been conducted *on* but not *with* youth. I end this chapter with a more explicit discussion of the analytic frameworks and methods I used in my research.

Chapter Four describes in greater depth the relationships I had with youth from this study prior to conducting this research, explores the methodologies utilized in my collaboration with Birdie, and illustrates how we put our co-analysis and findings to work in understanding SMAK both as a policy provided community space and also as a ‘free space’ (Fine & Weis, 1998) the youth used for a variety of reasons outside of traditional ‘support’ frameworks. Chapter Five explores the research I conducted with the Gay Straight Alliance at Hilltown Vocational High School, while Chapter Six explores the research carried out – primarily by Birdie – with The Crew. These three chapters constitute an ethnographic exploration of the lives of some Hilltown youth - youth who I was introduced to at a queer youth group but who then introduced me to very different

worlds in their lives outside of the community center. In Chapter Seven I will explore our findings and the ways in which youth interact with – or refuse – the policy provided architecture of assistance. Finally, in the postscript, Birdie and I will each reflect – separately – on our collaboration.

What follows in all of the chapters is also the description of an experiment. Unlike traditional research *on* youth, this research was conducted *with* youth and enrolled them into the discussion that often takes place *about* them. The project was collaborative at every stage – from the initial research proposal and the actual fieldwork through to the analysis of what we found. While I alone wrote this dissertation, it is the voices of the youth in Hilltown that I hope you hear.

CHAPTER 2

LOCATING YOUTH

“Youth, it seems, are everywhere and nowhere” (Miara & Soep, 2005:xv)

The publication of G. Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence* in 1904 was, quite literally, the “big bang” of youth studies. Hall’s naming of a biologically determined stage between childhood and adulthood – adolescence – simultaneously created and constituted not only a new phase in the lifespan, but also a new arena of scholarship. In the century since this publication, adolescence has been reimagined and reconstituted across the disciplines, in what may be blanketed broadly as a field entitled “youth studies”. Hall’s work provides a shared ‘origin story’ for this field, operating as an explosion which generated a range of theories, approaches and topics in the study of youth. This chapter is an attempt to map out the aftermath – to survey the landscape of youth studies a century after Halls’ inception of the field.

The study of youth is undertaken in a variety of disciplines; from psychology to education, from neurology to anthropology (and everything in between), interest in adolescence traverses the physical and social sciences. According to historical researcher Christine Griffin, “adolescence has been defined via an uneasy mixture of the biological and the social” (1993:19), and it is this same tension between biology and society that characterizes the research *on* adolescence over the past century. The research undertaken in the social sciences prioritize exploring youth as a *social* identity, and as such they exist in tension with fields in the physical sciences whose concerns lay in *biological* and *psychological* explorations of adolescence. Since the inception of adolescence as a

category researchers have vacillated between, and argued through, ‘nature versus nurture’ in their explorations of this age-stage. This chapter, which concerns itself with the historical trajectory of youth studies from earliest inception to contemporary discussions, traces the push and pull between these two orientations.

The chapter is organized into two sections. Section I is concerned with identifying the overarching analytical and conceptual paradigms in the study of adolescence. In particular, I identify and describe five paradigms: biological and universalizing approaches to adolescence in what I term the Evolutionary Paradigm, cultural and cross-cultural interventions into the evolutionary paradigm offered by anthropologists in the Cultural Variance Paradigm, psychological understandings of adolescence in the Developmental Paradigm, the combination of psychological and anthropological approaches to adolescence proposed in the Culture and Personality Movement, and sociological and cultural-studies approaches to marginalized groups of youth in the Subculture Paradigm.

Section II of the chapter is organized around the critiques and revisions of these earlier paradigms in the study of youth. Here I include four sections: the critiques of the Birmingham School approach to youth subcultures, revisions to developmental frameworks concerning the lack of inclusion of girls and ethnic-minority youth, interventions into the field of psychology and its role in the expert production of youth as governable subjects. This history lays the groundwork for the research explored in the following chapter produced by Foucauldian scholars in the Critical Youth Studies (CYS) project.

“Nature” Part 1: Hall and the Evolutionary Paradigm

G. Stanley Hall, described by his biographer Dorothy Ross as, “an early prophet of science, psychology, and youth,” (1972:xi) is famous for helping establish psychology as an academic discipline in America, for being the founding president of Clark University, and for bringing both Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung on their first trip to the United States in 1909. It is Hall’s book *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* (1904) which is largely cited as the work which invented the category ‘adolescence’ as we know it. More precisely we might say that his work constituted adolescence as an object of knowledge, as a ‘problem’ to be understood within a specific framework. Though many of Hall’s theories on and insights into this age-stage have since been left on the sidelines, there are several key organizing ideas which have taken hold in imaginings on youth and continue to influence work done on this topic a century later, the most influential of which is the very notion of adolescence as a discrete and universal stage in the life span.

Hall is the architect of what I term the Evolutionary Paradigm in youth research. Hall’s work connected the individual life span to narratives of evolution through his use of the ‘law of recapitulation’ - or ‘ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny’ - the theory that embryos of a species replay the evolution of that species during its’ development *in utero*.²³ According to reviewer Rolf E. Muuss²⁴, Hall believed “that the experiential

²³ “Hall sought to translate the ideas of Ernst Haeckel (1868), an early contributor to embryology, into a theory of life-span human development. Haeckel advanced the idea of recapitulation – that the adult stages of the ancestors comprising a species’ evolutionary (phylogenetic) histories were repeated in compressed form as the embryonic stages of the organism’s ontogeny.” (Steinberg & Lerner, 2004:46).

history of the human species had become part of the genetic structure of each individual,” (1962:13) and he superimposed this evolution onto the lifespan where the trajectory replaying evolution read upwards from infancy, to childhood, adolescence, adulthood as the pinnacle and then a movement downwards toward ‘old age’ which Hall likened to a ‘second childhood’. Through this trajectory the “individual re-lives the development of the human race from early animal-like primitivism, through a period of savagery, to the more recent civilized ways of life which characterize maturity,” (Muuss 1962:14). In this conceptualization infancy and childhood became linked to ‘primitivity’ and to a lack of control over impulses. For Hall, puberty is a savage period of storm and stress – a hormonally tumultuous stage where physiological factors (Muuss) or “inherited biological impulses” (Griffin 1993:16) bring about development. Key to Hall’s theory is an understanding that

these physiological factors were genetically determined, that internal directional forces predominately controlled and directed development, growth, and behavior...that *development and its behavioral concomitants occur in an inevitable and unchangeable pattern which is universal, regardless of the sociocultural environment.* (Muuss 1962: 14)

The internal and physiological changes of puberty were what ultimately enabled the individual to gain mastery over their impulses and initiate their move from primitive childhood to civilized adulthood. Thus, for Hall, adolescence was a critical point in the transition from childhood to adulthood, a moment where the individual ‘sinks or swims’ evolutionarily – proceeding either upward towards that which is marked as ‘adult’,

²⁴ I utilize Rolf E. Muuss’s characterizations of many adolescent theories throughout this chapter, drawing heavily from his influential and highly cited review text, *Theories of Adolescence* (1962).

‘civilized’ and ‘progressed’ or staying in a moment of arrested development where the individual remains ‘primitive’.

Focusing on physiological transitions during puberty, Hall understands adolescence as necessarily fraught with ‘*sturm und drang*’²⁵ or ‘storm and stress’ which has its roots in the biological changes an individual undergoes during puberty.²⁶ Because Hall rooted the particulars of this stage in biology, it was conceptualized as a universal experience which would have the same manifestation regardless of the cultural context in which it took place.

“Nurture” Part 1: Mead and the Cultural Variance Paradigm

Hall’s notion of adolescence as a biologically based universal age-stage characterized by ‘storm and stress’ was critiqued and challenged by other researchers in the half-decade following his publication of *Adolescence*. The first of those challenges and critiques came not from within psychology, but from another social science – namely, cultural anthropology. In particular Margaret Mead’s seminal text, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (1928)²⁷ represented the earliest anthropological attempt at utilizing a cross-cultural

²⁵ Which takes its name from an late 18th century German literary movement characterized by the focus on tensions between the individual and society and was highly emotional, “full of idealism, commitment to a goal, revolution against the old, expression of personal feelings, passion, and suffering. Hall saw an analogy between the objectives of this group of young writers...and the psychological characteristics of adolescence,” (Muuss 1962: 16). Interestingly, while the *sturm und drang* of the adolescent is conceptualized as growing from the tension between biology and society, this earlier use of *sturm und drang* most likely referred to the tension between society and an individual’s sense of will or personal agency.

²⁶ As I will explore in Section II of the chapter, this idea continues to inform not only academic scholarship on youth but is also a primary organizer in public discourse on adolescence (for instance in discussions of teenager’s ‘raging hormones’).

²⁷ And later, *Growing Up in New Guinea* (1930).

vantage on adolescence as ammunition against Hall's universalizing approach. Mead's exploration of the adolescent²⁸ experience in Samoa illustrated the importance of cultural context in how adolescence as a life-stage is experienced:

The Samoan pattern of child-rearing shows no signs of the extreme discontinuity between childhood and adulthood we see in America....When the child becomes an adult, the demands on him do not increase very much; they remain continuous with his past contributions...This attitude and the lack of pressure produce comparatively fewer maladjustments and neuroses than in America. (Muuss 1962: 66-67).

Thus Mead's study worked against the idea that adolescence was inevitably a period of 'storm and stress', instead locating the tumultuous model of adolescence witnessed in the West as a product of *culture* rather than biology. If Hall's work had posited *nature* as the organizing factor of adolescence, Mead's research shifted the focus onto *nurture*.

Mead conceptualized her work as an intentional and purposeful intervention into the biological and universal models of adolescence in circulation in the West²⁹ which would make an impact on the ground level. Indeed, this is evident in her accessible writing style³⁰, her target audience³¹, and in the self-proclaimed purpose of her book;

I wrote this book as a contribution to our knowledge of how much human character and human capacities and human well-being of young people depend on what they learn and on the social arrangements of the society within which they are born and reared. *This is still something that we*

²⁸ Despite the use of male pronouns in the following quote, Mead's research actually focused primarily on the *female* adolescent experience in Samoa.

²⁹ Indeed, witness the subtitle for her book – *A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (emphasis added).

³⁰ Which she claimed was, "the first piece of anthropological fieldwork which was written without the paraphernalia of scholarship designed to mystify the lay reader and confound one's colleagues," (Mead 1973: Preface).

³¹ "As this book was about adolescents, I tried to couch it in language that would be communicative to those who had most to do with adolescents – teachers, parents, and soon-to-be parents," (Mead 1973: Preface).

need to know if we are to change our present social institutions in time to prevent disaster. (Mead 1973: Preface – emphasis added)

True to her intentions, Mead's exploration of adolescent experiences outside the boundaries of the United States would have a profound impact on conceptualizations of adolescence within America's borders. While her work attempted to wrest adolescence from its moorings in psychology (through positing this stage as highly culturally variable), researchers within the field of psychology sought to reestablish adolescence as a teleological, universal and measurable phenomenon.

“Nature” Part 2: The Developmental Paradigm

Hall's work on adolescence sparked an interest in understanding the rules and frameworks guiding human growth. While Margaret Mead argued for the relevance of culture and cultural variability, many psychologists took up Hall's quest to determine and understand how one grows from infant to adult – a journey that became known as “development”. At its most abstract, developmental psychology is concerned with investigating this passage – or discrete components of the passage³² - from newborn to grown-up, and generally involves the establishment of progressive stages that are conceptualized as predictable, discernable, causal and teleological. As with any field of inquiry, developmental psychology has undergone considerable shifts in its theoretical and methodological orientations, yet we can discern four overarching theoretical frameworks (biological-maturationist, behaviorist, cognitive-developmental, and

³² For instance, chronological components i.e. ‘child development’, ‘adolescent development’, or topical components like ‘sexual development’, ‘identity development’, etc.

cultural-historical³³) that exist within two primary (yet contrasting) paradigm orientations – Nature versus Nurture.

The biological-maturationist framework is a slight variation on what I earlier referred to as the Evolutionary Paradigm: based upon the same early work (of G. Stanley Hall), yet with a focus on psychological – rather than evolutionary - implications and theories. Arnold Gesell, whose work exemplifies this perspective, is characterized by reviewer Rolf E. Muuss as focusing on “the behavioral manifestations of development and personality, rather than their structure” (Muuss 1962: 112) where Gesell was concerned with establishing, observing and defining the “over-all pattern of developmental trends and the ‘norms’ of behavior in their chronological sequence,” (ibid.)³⁴. For both Hall and Gesell these rules, trends and norms were biological in origin. Indeed, Muuss notes that for Gesell,

biology determines the order of the appearance of behavioral traits and developmental trends...genetic factors guide and control the direction and sequence of the maturation mechanism. The concept of maturation implies that the individual masters certain forms of behavior with no known direct external influence. (1962:114 – my emphasis)

In contrast, the research of John B. Watson³⁵ shifted the developmental loci from nature (biology) to nurture (society) in a behaviorist framework which emphasized the interactions between the individual and their environment (what would be conceptualized in the above quote as ‘direct external influences’) as the primary organizer in development. According to reviewer Frances Degen Horowitz, Watson’s

³³ For more information on these frameworks see Cole, Cole & Lightfoot, 2004.

³⁴ The impact of Gesell’s work is taken up in Section II.

³⁵ Whose research took place in the 1920s through 1940s.

environmentalism was unbridled. He saw no role for inherited characteristics as ultimately having any determining role in developmental outcome. He did not deny genetic influences, but he believed that what the environment provided in the way of experience and training could override organismic variables and ultimately determine developmental outcome. [1992:364]

This behaviorist line of inquiry was later taken up (and reached wider circulation) in the work of B.F. Skinner. Both Watson and Skinner explored how behavior is conditioned through interactions between the individual and their social environment (i.e. through reward or punishment). However, according to Horowitz, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, behaviorism was, “eclipsed by the organismic/cognitive revolution... fueled by American developmentalists’ having discovered Piaget,” (1992:364).

Piaget is widely credited as the architect of the cognitive-developmental paradigm and his focus on biologically and genetically based patterns of learning marked a return to ‘nature’ in developmental models.³⁶ Concerned with the evolution of learning and reasoning patterns in the individual, Piaget sought to explore the links between biology and epistemology³⁷ in cognitive development. For Piaget, according to reviewer Jerome Bruner, “mental growth consists in the child ‘moving’ from simpler to more complex systems of logical operations,” (1997:66). Utilizing biologically and genetically based stages³⁸, Piaget explored the cognitive structures involved in each period of development.

³⁶ As Horowitz notes, “if Gesell’s name did not surface in the discussion of these matters, it was certainly a return, albeit in a more sophisticated framework, to some of Gesell’s basic tenets,” (1992:364).

³⁷ Epistemology is defined as, “the branch of philosophy dealing with the study of the nature of knowledge, its origin, foundations, limits and validity,” (Webster’s Dictionary 1989:318).

³⁸ Piaget’s periods or stages of development were as follows: sensorimotor (birth through age 2), concrete preoperational subperiod (2 to 11 years), concrete operational subperiod (7 to 11 years) and formal operational (age 12 through adult). In particular Piaget viewed adolescence as involving the move from concrete to abstract thinking.

However, Piaget never made explicit, “what propelled the child’s growing mind from one stage of logical operations to the next higher one...what [he did make] abundantly clear, however, was that mental growth followed an *invariant course*,” (Bruner, 1997:66 – my emphasis). This stands in stark contrast to the fourth and final developmental paradigm in this schema, the cultural-historical paradigm characterized by the work of Vygotsky. According to Bruner, “if Piaget was preoccupied with the invariant order of mental development, Vygotsky, was on his part preoccupied with how others provide the cultural patterning that makes the process of development possible,” (1997:69). Here we witness the pendulum swing back to ‘nurture’ in the developmental model.

Vygotsky picked up on questions of cognition previously laid out by Piaget, yet his approach and findings differed dramatically, as he delinked cognitive development from its biological and genetic roots, instead shifting the focus onto culture as a variable in development. As explained by Bruner:

While for Vygotsky, as for Piaget, mind mediates between the external world and individual experience, Vygotsky never conceived of mind as expressing a logical calculus. Mind, rather, comprised process for endowing experience with *meaning*. Meaning making, in Vygotsky’s view of the matter, requires not only language but a grasp of the cultural context in which *language is used*. Mental development consists in mastering higher order, culturally embodied symbolic structures, each of which may incorporate or even displace what existed before, as with algebra absorbing and replacing arithmetic. These higher order systems are cultural products. As instruments of mind, they do not mature exclusively through endogenous principles of growth. They are not only appropriated from the tool kit of the culture and its language, but depend upon continued social interaction. Consequently, the most central question for Vygotsky is how a culture’s symbolic tools manage through social interaction to get from ‘outside’ into our ‘inside’ repertory of thought. (Bruner 1997:68 – italics in original, my underlining).

The cultural-historical model, and this interest in exploring the ‘outside’ (nurture) and ‘inside’ (nature) of development, was given further expression in the 1960s through the groundbreaking research of developmental psychologist Erik Erikson. This was facilitated in part through Erikson’s earlier work with a group of interdisciplinary researchers, primarily psychologists and anthropologists, concerned with discerning “the innate from the cultural in human development,” (Friedman 1999:134). Together, these scholars comprised the Culture and Personality Movement.

“Nature & Nurture”: The Culture and Personality Movement

Social reformer and funding administrator³⁹ Lawrence Frank was an influential figure in the study of children. Margaret Mead considered him, “the father of the child development movement for using foundation funds to gather ‘living networks of people who could learn to work together’ (mainly psychoanalysts and cultural anthropologists),” (Friedman 1999:125). This living network would later be referred to as the Culture and Personality school, and two of its most influential and famous members would prove to be anthropologist Margaret Mead and psychologist Erik Erikson. Their collaboration would offer a fundamentally different approach to development which bridged the gap between psychology’s *nature* and anthropology’s *nurture* orientation in adolescent research.

Lawrence Frank believed that the “convergence between psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology represented the most fruitful approach to the topic,” (Friedman 1999:124) of child development. In 1935 Frank arranged an appointment for Erik Erikson, a German immigrant who was trained in child psychoanalysis by Anna Freud in

³⁹ First with the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial in the 1920s, then later with the Rockefeller’s General Education Board (1931-1935) and finally with the Josiah Macy Junior Foundation (according to Friedman, 1999).

Vienna, at Yale University. At Yale Erikson worked with Arnold Gesell's Child Development Clinic⁴⁰ and the interdisciplinary Institute of Human Relations.⁴¹ Through his connection to anthropologist H. Scudder Mekeel⁴², Erikson was invited onto the Pine Ridge reservation (in South Dakota) during the summer of 1937 to conduct research on Sioux child socialization. Erikson found that despite colonization and its dramatic economic effects, Sioux children, "still enjoyed a relatively rich and spontaneous existence, certainly in comparison with the discontented lives of many white children, who were being prepared for mastery of the marketplace and the machine," (Friedman 1999:134). According to biographer Lawrence J. Friedman, this experience,

dramatically increased Erik's interest in the 'outer world' of culture and social practice...Indeed, the trip seemed to whet his appetite for the eclectic but heavily anthropological culture and personality movement, and his friend Lawrence Frank introduced him to several of the participants.⁴³ (ibid.)

In particular, within this network it was Margaret Mead who established a close connection with Erikson as, "she understood that he was breaking from the individualist notion of a person (the subject) that was pervasive in America; instead, Erik argued that

⁴⁰ While Erikson worked initially with (biological-maturationist) developmental psychologist Gesell, they eventually had a contentious falling out when Gesell – whose laboratory utilized photography to document and explore the behavioral manifestations of development – denied Erikson access to the children's records. According to biographer Lawrence J. Friedman, Erikson "recognized the ruse. The immediate cause of the rupture had been his angry protest when Gesell suppressed photographic evidence of a little boy with an erection who was masturbating," (1999:128).

⁴¹ Interestingly, in 1930 Gesell's clinic was assigned to a wing of the building that also housed the Institute of Human Relations, "to promote interdisciplinary cooperation with the institute's psychologists, psychoanalysts, anthropologists, and other scholars," (Friedman 1999:127). Apparently unwilling to partake in these cross disciplinary discussions, "Gesell balked, built a separate entrance for his staff of thirty-one, and locked connecting doors to the institute," (ibid.).

⁴² Whom he had met at the Harvard Psychological Clinic (according to Friedman, 1999:133).

⁴³ Such as Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, Ruth Benedict and Kurt Lewin.

the self was inseparable from important others *within a social context*,” (Friedman 1999:137, my emphasis). Mead and Erikson shared insights back and forth, and worked together on a series of important projects.⁴⁴ According to Muuss, in “comparing recent writings of Erikson and Mead we find a degree of accord which one could not have imagined when comparing early psychoanalytic theory with the writings of cultural anthropologists in the late twenties and early thirties,” (1962: 60). In particular it was Erikson who was profoundly influenced by Mead’s insight into the variability of the adolescent experiences within different cultural contexts, and her work would dramatically inform his developmental model.

⁴⁴ In 1939, in response to the emerging war in Europe, many prominent members of the Culture and Personality Movement (including Mead, Bateson, Benedict and Lewin) were involved in the Committee for Nationale Morale (CNM), an association of scholars interested in investigating the, “psychological dimensions of warfare and propaganda in ways that might benefit American morale and federal policies,” (Friedman 1999:164). They recruited Erikson and others to join a sister organization they created, the Council on Intercultural Relations (CIR) which would, “apply anthropological and related methods to the international crisis in ways that would facilitate Allied military efforts,” (ibid.) through sharing their information with governmental agencies like the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). “Agencies like the OSS, the CNM and the CIR were eager for reports on the values of wartime adversaries – what held each national culture together and what might prompt it to fragment,” (Friedman, 1999:176) and to that end the CIR put Erikson to work studying the youth of Hitler’s Germany. Erikson’s work on this topic was truly ‘revolutionary’ (as Bateson would characterize it to officials at the OSS) as he explored Hitler’s use of adolescent imagery in his nationalist tactics. Erikson’s essay characterized Hitler as a “gang leader who appealed to estranged German adolescents to defy their parents and respectable society, and to believe ‘that the adolescent is always right, that aggression is good, that conscience is an affliction, adjustment a crime’. This ‘adolescent imagery’ bonding the Fuhrer to German youth eventually won acceptance by the whole nation.” (Friedman, 1999:168). In contrast to conceptualizations of Hitler as a father figure, Erikson posited that, “Hitler offered himself as ‘the adolescent who never even aspired to become a father in any connotation’,” but was rather a gangleader which helped youth “identify with the Fuhrer; [as] an adolescent who never gave in,” (Friedman, 1999:169-173).

Erikson's model was a revision of Sigmund Freud's five stages of the life-cycle⁴⁵ into a more culturally-informed eight stage model of human development⁴⁶. Each of these stages is characterized by a crisis that must be resolved in order for the next stage to be achieved. Erikson conceptualized two possible outcomes from each stage – a positive one which then facilitates further development, or a negative one which damages the ego. The two possibilities given for adolescence in “the fifth and most central stage in the life cycle” (Friedman 1999: 225) are: Identity versus Role Diffusion. In this stage, the individual struggles with the discontinuity between the biological and physical changes he is undergoing and his previous image of himself. It is through the confrontation of the individual with this “physiological revolution” (Erikson 1968: 128) that the adolescent must negotiate who he or she is: “The adolescent must reestablish ego identity in the light of his earlier experiences and accept his new body changes and libidinal feelings as part of himself. If ego identity is not satisfactorily established in this stage, there is the danger that role diffusion will endanger further ego development,” (Muuss 1962: 36).

For Erikson, like his predecessors G. Stanley Hall and Sigmund and Anna Freud, development was teleological and functioned by the epigenetic principle which posits that we “develop according to steps predetermined in the human organism” (Erikson

⁴⁵ Freud conceptualized these as “psychosexual stages” and they were: oral (birth to 1 year), anal (1 to 3 years), phallic (3 to 6 years), latency (7 to 11 years) and genital (12 to 18 years).

⁴⁶ Known today as ‘developmental stages’, Erikson originally coined them ‘psychosocial stages’, a terminological shift which illustrated his combination of both psychological and cultural variables. Erikson's psychosocial stages were as follows: Stage 1 – Trust vs. Mistrust (birth to 1 year), Stage 2 – Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (1 to 3 years), Stage 3 – Initiative vs. Guilt (3 to 6 years), Stage 4 – Industry vs. Inferiority (7 to 11 years), Stage 5 – Identity vs. Role Diffusion (Adolescence), Stage 6 – Intimacy vs. Isolation (Young Adulthood), Stage 7 – Generativity vs. Stagnation (Adulthood), and Stage 8 – Ego Integrity vs. Disgust (Maturity). (Muuss, 1962:35)

1968: 93). However, while the stages may be predetermined, what happened within each stage, how each stage was experienced and negotiated, and how the individual established identity, according to Erikson, “varies from culture to culture,” (Erikson 1968: 93). Indeed, one of the most interesting things about Erikson was his interest in both the ‘inner world’ and ‘outer world’ of the individual, where Erikson was concerned with forging connections between psychological understandings of an individual’s identity and the cultural context in which they lived.

Erikson’s work here breaks with his predecessors as he stages an important intervention into this area by his, “*systematic reorganization of psychoanalytic theory in the light of anthropological findings*...[where he] brought about a shift in emphasis to the social conditions and organizations in which the ego must be rooted in order to develop normally,” (Muuss 1962: 39 – my emphasis). Erikson’s work impacted generations of researchers and he would later come to be referred to as the “architect of identity”.

However,

unlike popularizers of his identity concept, Erikson refused to describe it as a fixed, definite entity or quality. ‘Identity’ is not a thing but a process...What made his description of identity as a developmental stage especially troublesome was that, despite his intentions, it seemed to convey a very cohesive and sequential view of the full life cycle...The problem with this progressive, linear neatness was that *if identity concerned the place of an individual in his culture and his historical moment (as Erikson insisted)*, it was constantly being reworked throughout a person’s life. [Friedman 1999: 225-226 – emphasis added]

Despite his later intentions to intervene upon this idea of identity as static and identity-formation as existing solely within stage five of the life cycle⁴⁷, the developmental paradigm retained much rigidity and determinism in its circulation within psychological

⁴⁷ At later lectures, “[a]most in defiance of his formal life cycle charts, he described life stages as circling back on themselves,” (Friedman 1999: 227).

explorations of youth. Erikson's use of cultural anthropology in his model of identity and development offered the prospect of a major shift in the psychology of adolescence, yet psychologists continued to negate the 'social' in their developmental models.⁴⁸ This stands in stark contrast to the work done in the following decades by sociologists and cultural studies theorists who return to 'nurture' in their exploration of youth as a social identity.

"Nurture" Part 2: Sociology, Cultural Studies & the Subculture Paradigm

We now turn our attention to the initial investigations into the sociological dimensions of youth and youth *cultures*. More than a semantic shift, this new paradigm was concerned with moving the focus from the psychology of the *individual* adolescent onto the social dynamics of adolescent *groups*. According to anthropologist Mary Bucholtz, "the study of youth culture began in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century as an outgrowth of criminology and delinquency studies within sociology," (2002:536), most notably the work produced on deviant subcultures by sociologists at the University of Chicago, later known as the Chicago School.

The Chicago School researchers sought to dispute the prevailing understandings of deviancy in circulation at the beginning of the twentieth century. These understandings, characterized by the work of Cesare Lombroso in anthropometry, posited 'nature' as the root of deviance in its production of a 'criminal personality'. In contrast, sociologists at the Chicago School focused on 'nurture', arguing that deviance, "when studied in its socio-cultural context, could be shown to be a normal response 'determined

⁴⁸ And indeed, the connections Erikson made between psychology and anthropology continue to be relegated to footnotes in his biographies (see Friedman 1999 and Kracke 1978 for rare exceptions).

by cultural norms, and not a symptom of psychological deficiency’,” (Bennett & Kahn-Harris, 2004:3 – quoting Frith).

Focusing on ‘urban micro-sociology’ the researchers at the Chicago School utilized qualitative methodology to produce ethnographic studies on deviant ‘subcultures’, which “emerge when a number of actors with similar problems of social adjustment interact with one another and innovate new frames of reference,” (Thornton, 1997:13).⁴⁹ According to subculture scholar Sarah Thornton, what was striking about the Chicago School research was the way it “gave particular attention to the interaction of people’s perceptions of themselves with others’ views of them,” (Thornton, 1997:11).⁵⁰ Attending to the ‘insiders’ experiential perspective, the Chicago School researchers highlighted the construction of “alternative systems of shared symbolic meaning” (Bucholtz, 2002: 536) located contextually within a cultural frame of reference which marked this group as ‘deviant’.⁵¹

The Chicago School’s challenge to dominant understandings of ‘deviance’, their focus on the experiential aspects and symbolic logic of subcultures, and their exploration of the agentic construction of alternative frames of reference within society’s most marginalized groups, constituted an enduring framework for social scientists’ exploration

⁴⁹ Cohen defined this as such in his 1955 article, *A General Theory of Subcultures*. Importantly, Thornton notes that earlier work in the Chicago School was working in this “tradition before the term ‘subculture’ was even coined,” (1997:12).

⁵⁰ Two of the most famous and characterizing texts in this tradition to emerge from the Chicago School were Thrasher’s *The Gang* (1936) and Becker’s *The Outsiders* (1963), which respectively explored the group symbols and logics of two ‘deviant’ subcultures: gang members (Thrasher) and jazz musicians (Becker).

⁵¹ Indeed, according to Chicago School theorist Howard Becker, it is the very process of *labeling* a behavior deviant which constructs it as such. In other words, “social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular persons and labeling them as outsiders,” (Becker, 1963:9).

of subcultures. Indeed, numerous scholars identify the Chicago School as an intellectual precursor to the research on youth subcultures later produced by scholars at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in England (Gelder & Thornton, 1997; Bucholtz, 2002; Bennett & Kahn-Harris, 2004; Maira & Soep, 2005)⁵².

Established in 1964 by Richard Hoggart, the CCCS grew out of a tradition of literary criticism concerned with the social significance of literary texts⁵³. Hoggart's publication of *The Uses of Literacy* (1958)⁵⁴ marked a moment where the tools of this brand of literary criticism were brought to bear on questions of popular culture – an arena long ignored and devalued⁵⁵. Under the leadership of Hoggart and his successors

⁵²A very brief discussion and description of the Birmingham School is included here. For more information on the CCCS and their role in British Cultural Studies see Turner, 1996. For discussion of conceptions of subjectivity in the Birmingham School see Lave, 1991.

⁵³ According to British Cultural Studies scholar Graeme Turner, this type of literary criticism is commonly associated with F.R. Leavis.

⁵⁴ And later Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1966)

⁵⁵ Indeed, according to Graeme Turner's historical review of British Cultural Studies, the field of literary criticism – and especially that associated with Leavis – was elitist in regards to popular culture which was “to be deplored for its deficiencies” (1996:40) in contrast to ‘high’ culture and its world of art and literature. For Turner, “the account of the everyday life of the ordinary citizen produced by these studies was extremely remote and patronizing...it was a discourse of the ‘cultured’ about the culture of those without ‘culture’,” (1996:40). This easy elitism was achieved in part by the shared (upper) class background of those scholars. In contrast Turner notes that post War educational opportunities produced a number of “scholarship boys and girls” (1996:40) who were often of the working class, including Richard Hoggart (and his later successor to the CCCS, Raymond Williams). These two theorists both worked as adult education tutors early in their careers which brought them in touch “with a range of subcultural groups not normally encountered at university, whose membership in a popular rather than an elite culture needed to be accepted and understood by their teachers” (1996:41). This experience – combined with their shared (working) class background – encouraged their application of literary criticism onto popular cultural forms as well. Indeed, this was a burgeoning question at the time as scholars and researchers alike grappled with questions of popular culture. In fact, according to Turner, the 1960 National Union of Teachers

Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, the CCCS would focus in on popular culture, reframing and refiguring it as central – rather than marginal – in cultural life⁵⁶. In particular, CCCS researchers would focus their attention on working-class youth subcultures. Bringing Marxist and Gramscian understandings of ideology and hegemony to bear on the study of youth, the researchers at CCCS explored working class youth subcultures as sites of ideological struggle and negotiation for their members, thus raising to a new level of significance the meaningfulness of youth's cultural practices.

The Birmingham School and Youth Studies

The seminal Birmingham School publication on youth subcultures, *Resistance Through Ritual: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (Hall and Jefferson) is an edited volume which contains excerpts from a variety of CCCS ethnographies on youth as well as critiques of this approach⁵⁷. The introduction to this volume, "Subcultures, Cultures and Class: A Theoretical Overview" (by Clarke, Hall, Jefferson & Roberts) clearly articulates the CCCS approach to youth subcultures, and presents the reader with the

(NUT) conference entitled "Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility" was aimed at "finding ways of dealing with popular culture that did not dismiss it out of hand," (1996:42) but was still, "a high-culture view of popular culture, interested in aesthetic rather than social pleasures and meanings," (ibid.). Notably both Hoggart and Williams (along with later CCCS successor Stuart Hall) were part of this conference and its debates.

⁵⁶ While Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* was successful in its application of literary tools to popular culture, Hoggart was still critical of post-war mass popular culture which he saw as a poor substitute to the 'organic' prewar working class life he waxed nostalgic about while simultaneously dismissing working class youth as "the directionless and tamed helots of a machine minding class" and "hedonistic but passive barbarians" (1958:250). Interestingly, the major works to come out of CCCS would examine the, "rituals and practices that generated meaning and pleasure within, precisely, that fragment of the cultural field Hoggart had dismissed in *The Uses of Literacy*: urban youth subcultures." (Turner, 1996:72).

⁵⁷ For instance McRobbie and Garber's chapter "Girls and Subcultures: An Exploration" which proposes a feminist critique of the focus on *male* subcultures in CCCS research. The critiques of the Birmingham School are addressed later in the chapter.

historical context of this work. According to these authors, researchers working in post-war Britain had previously posited that profound economic changes and the post-war consumer boom were leading to an “erosion of traditional class distinctions” (Bennett & Kahn-Harris, 2004:5) under a new ideology of ‘affluence’ marked by a rise in working-class spending and consumption⁵⁸. The discourses around this new ‘classless’ society critically targeted youth⁵⁹, who were imagined as inhabiting a unified consumer-based ‘Youth Culture’ divorced from traditional class distinctions and defined by its ‘phenomenal aspects’ – it’s music, styles and leisure patterns (Clarke, 1976).

For the researchers at the Birmingham School, ‘Youth Culture’ as a concept disguised the *inherently* classed experiences of youth, and focused instead on youth as simply a ‘market phenomenon’ (Clarke, 1976).⁶⁰ In contrast to this idea of a unitary,

⁵⁸ Clarke et al. note that while working-class living standards did improve after the war, “this general rise in living standards critically *obscured* the fact that the *relative* positions of the classes had remained virtually unchanged,” (1976:22 – emphasis in original). Thus a discourse of ‘affluence’ circulated which, “assumed the proportions of a full-blown ideology precisely because it was required to cover over the gaps between real inequalities and the promised Utopia...by projecting this ideological scenario, the ‘affluence’ myth aimed to give the working classes a stake in a future which had not yet arrived... ‘affluence’ was, essentially, an ideology of the dominant culture *about* and *for* the working class, directed *at* them,” (1976:37 – emphasis in original).

⁵⁹ As Clarke et al. describe, “Everything that was said and thought about working class adults was raised to a new level with respect to the working class young. Born during the war, they were seen as having least experience of and commitment to pre-war social patterns... Older people were, as it were, half-way between the old and the new world. But ‘youth’ was wholly and exclusively in and of the new post-war world. And what, principally, made the difference was, precisely, their *age*. ..Thus, the simple fact of when you were born displaced the more traditional category of class as a more potent index of social position; and the pre-war chasm between the classes was translated into a mere ‘gap’ between the generations.” (1976:22)

⁶⁰ For Clarke et al., “the term ‘Youth Culture’ appropriates the situation of the young almost exclusively in terms of the commercial and publicity manipulation and exploitation of the young. As a concept, it has little or no explanatory power. We must try to get behind this market phenomenon, to its deeper social, economic and cultural roots,” (1976:16).

unified and classless ‘Youth Culture’, researchers at the Birmingham Centre described and investigated the existence of a range of *resolutely working class* ‘youth subcultures’.⁶¹ The CCCS researchers situated these subcultures within a particular historical post-war moment where youth’s expanding affluence and leisure buttressed against their very real location in a (working) class-based culture. They then set out to investigate the means through which these subcultures were ‘doubly articulated’ to both their ‘parent culture’ (i.e. working class culture) and the ‘dominant’ culture (Clarke, 1976). This was achieved through the CCCS’s operationalization of Marxist, Althusserian and Gramscian theoretical frameworks, described below.

The CCCS researchers argued for the importance of class as a structuring concept but they broke from a traditional Marxist understanding of culture as “totally determined by economic relationships,” (Bennett, 1981:7) in favor of a new critical Marxism which viewed culture and economy in a dialogue where culture, “actively influences and has consequences for economic and political relationships rather than simply being passively influenced by them,” (ibid.). This shift towards a critical Marxism was further shaped by the CCCS’s utilization of Althusser’s argument that “key ‘ideological’ apparatuses (the law, the family, the education system, for instance) are every bit as significant as economic conditions,” (Turner 1996:23)⁶². For the researchers at the Birmingham School

⁶¹ For the CCCS researchers, “youth subcultures were always *working class*,” (Gelder 1997:84 – emphasis in original). In contrast, “middle class counter-cultures are diffuse, less group-centered, more individualized. [They] precipitate, typically, not tight sub-cultures but a diffuse counter-culture *milieu*,” (Clarke 1976:60 – emphasis in original). See Clarke et al. for a more thorough discussion of this class-based distinction.

⁶² According to Turner, “When [Raymond] Williams breaks with the traditional Marxist division of base and superstructure, he does so in order to foreground the role of culture. He concludes the discussion of this issue in *Marxism and Literature* by saying that it is not the base or the superstructure we should be examining, but rather the processes that

it is in these ideological apparatuses “that a subordinate class *lives its subordination*,” (Clarke 1976:39 – emphasis in original) through their interactions with dominant ideologies.

While earlier Marxist theories had described ideology as “a kind of veil over the eyes of the working class” (Turner 1996:24), the Althusserian notion of ideology utilized by CCCS researchers did not view ideology as a means to construct ‘false consciousness’ but rather as a conceptual framework, “through which men interpret, make sense of, experience and ‘live’ the material conditions in which they find themselves,” (Hall 1980a, 33). In order to explore the tensions in, and the importance of, subordinate groups’ interactions with dominant ideologies and institutions, the CCCS researchers turned to the work of Antonio Gramsci. In particular, they utilized Gramsci’s work on ‘hegemony’, a term which refers to “the moment when a ruling class is able, not only to *coerce* a subordinate class to conform to its interests...[but] to *win and shape consent*,” (Clarke, 1976:38).

For the CCCS researchers the “terrain on which this hegemony is won or lost,” (ibid.) is the institutions and apparatuses (such as the school, the family, the church) that socialize youth into class based positions. Crucially they state that, “these apparatuses reproduce class relations, and thus class subordination...[but] *the struggle against class hegemony also takes place within these institutions...they become the ‘site’ of class struggle*,” (Clarke, 1976:40 – my emphasis). In the shift from Althusserian notions of

integrate them – the processes through which history and culture are determined. The examination of determination leads, inevitably, to an examination of the mechanisms through which it is held to occur: mechanisms variously defined as the working of ideology.” (1996:61)

ideology to ones informed by Gramsci's notion of hegemony, the continual struggle for consent forms the backdrop against which youth subcultures are set. For Gramsci,

cultural domination is the product of complex negotiations and alignments of interests; it is never simply imposed from above, nor is it inevitably produced through language or through ideological apparatuses such as the education system. The achievement of hegemony is sustained only through the continual winning of consent... Gramsci's insistence on the production of consent implies a cultural field that is composed through much more vigorous and dynamic struggle than that envisioned by Althusser. [Turner, 1996:61]

Indeed Turner notes that the crucial difference between Althusser and Gramsci, "lies in the central role negotiation and change play within Gramsci's model of society"

(1996:197). It is this "negotiation, resistance [and] struggle" (Clarke 1976:44) between the working class youth subcultures and the apparatuses of the dominant culture which captivate the Birmingham School researchers.

Far from being trivial or deviant the activities of youth now became arenas of rich meaning which the CCCS researchers attempted to decode⁶³. In this framework youth are seen as *producers* of meaning, and the CCCS researchers paid particular attention to the moments where such meanings were articulated *in resistance* to dominant culture through strategies of appropriation and subversion. Two of the most characterizing and influential pieces to emerge in this tradition were Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (1977) and Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), discussed below.

⁶³ According to subculture historian Ken Gelder, "[i]n this context, youth became expressive, meaningful, significant...youth subcultures could thus be read as a kind of text or sign," (1997:84).

Youth Resistance: Work & Semiotics

Willis's text is an ethnographic study exploring 'nonacademic' working class (male) youth and their transition from school to work, which Willis sees as, "a crucial and privileged moment in the continuous regeneration of working class cultural forms," (1977:2). True to the theoretical orientation of the CCCS, Willis does not see the educational system as an ideological apparatus producing submissive subjects, rather he envisions the school as a battlefield in which the 'lads', "are not passive bearers of ideology, but *active appropriators* who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation and partial penetration of those structures," (Willis 1976:175 – my emphasis).⁶⁴ In this battlefield the 'lads' in fact accurately recognize, "their real conditions of existence as members of a [subordinate] class," (1977:136) and thus construct a resistant counter-hegemonic (or 'counter school') culture. This counter-hegemonic system ironically, "represents both a freedom, election and transcendence, and precise insertion into a system of exploitation and oppression for working class people," (Willis, 1977:120). That it is their resistant cultural practices which ultimately leads them to reproduce themselves as working class leads a reviewer to exclaim that, "a better example of the process of hegemony would be hard to find," (Turner, 1996:162).

As Turner continues,

Accurately enough, they see the carrot of credentialism offered to them as a giant con; rather than chase the chimera of middle class upward mobility, they opt to withdraw from the race and seek unskilled employment....The boys' rejection of qualifications, their contempt for education, their masculinist privileging of physical over mental work and their ridicule of those who accept the ideologies of the school all reinforce

⁶⁴According to Aronowitz in the preface to Willis's book, "This is the enduring contribution of *Learning to Labour*: it helps us to understand that people cannot be filled with ideology as a container is filled with water," (1977:xiii).

the conviction that their interests will be served by virtually any working class job and defeated by virtually any middle class job. [Turner, 1996:162]

Departing from the ethnographic methodology of Willis, Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* is concerned with engaging with "subcultures at the level of signs," (Turner, 1996:107). While it had been the material 'things' (the dress, the music, the slang) of youth culture which captivated media attention in post-war Britain, they had largely neglected the *meanings* of these objects. In the semiotic analyses conducted by researchers at the Birmingham School, and exemplified in the work of Hebdige, the situated use and meanings of objects take precedence, for it is "*the activity of stylization* – the active organization of objects with activities and outlooks, which produce an organized group-identity in the form and shape of a coherent and distinctive way of 'being-in-the-world,'" (Clarke 1976:54 – my emphasis).⁶⁵ Here youth were not simply (and passively) picking up objects and goods but were, "actively constructing a specific selection of things and goods *into* a style," (ibid. – emphasis in original).

Earlier semiotic theorists viewed this act of stylization as that which took class from an abstract concept to a phenomenological one where it could be seen, "working out in practice as a material force, dressed up, as it were, in experience and exhibited in style," (Hebdige, 1979:78).⁶⁶ Focusing on rock music, especially Punk, Hebdige diverged from the CCCS preoccupation with class by foregrounding race, ethnicity and

⁶⁵ According to Turner, "When semiotic analytical methods are incorporated into such interests, both the power of 'texts' and the importance of the social and political contexts of their production and reception are acknowledged. This combination – a legacy of the mixed parentage of literary studies and sociology – gave the cultural studies tradition of textual analysis its distinctive character, in theory and in practice." (1996:82)

⁶⁶ In this quote Hebdige is referring to the earlier work of Phil Cohen who heavily influences his own research. See Clarke et al. for a description of Cohen's work and its place in the CCCS history.

immigration patterns in the ‘cultural syncreticism’ of subcultural styles. Utilizing the anthropological concept of *bricolage* where, “things are put to uses in ways for which they were not intended [and] ways which dislocate them from their ‘normal’ context,” (Gelder, 1997:88), Hebdige explored punks as *bricoleurs* whose appropriation and symbolic dislocation of traditional styles was a form of ‘refusal’. As Hebdige states,

subcultures represent ‘noise’ (as opposed to sound): interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media. We should therefore not underestimate the signifying power of the spectacular subculture not only as a metaphor for potential anarchy ‘out there’ but as an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation. [1979:130]

Thus Hebdige viewed in subcultures the power and potential to subvert and resist dominant frameworks. Like Willis’s lads, the punks in Hebdige’s text offer, “gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the ‘silent majority’, which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion [and] which contradicts the myth of consensus,” (Hebdige, 18).⁶⁷

The focus on resistance and subversion seen in Willis and Hebdige’s texts brought attention to youth’s *agency* in a manner previously incomprehensible in the psychological discussions of adolescence where youth were passive (albeit ‘difficult’) riders on an evolutionary and developmental journey. Even Mead’s research which worked against the universalizing discourse of storm and stress still conceptualized adolescents as

⁶⁷ Interestingly, Hebdige’s later work would deny, “the connection between youth subcultures and the signification of negation or resistance. Admitting that his argument was reinforced by punk’s explicit political agenda, and that subsequent youth movements no longer seem to articulate such a strong political resistance, Hebdige draws the useful theoretical lesson that ‘theoretical models are as tied to their own times as the human bodies that produce them’,” (Turner, 1996:108).

(passive) *receivers* of cultural modes of adolescence.⁶⁸ In contrast, research coming out of the CCCS was radical for the intellectual shift it produced by portraying youth as *producers* and *agents* involved in negotiating the complex historical conditions in which youth found themselves. Indeed, the work of the Birmingham School would profoundly reorganize scholarly discussions of ‘youth’, bringing understandings of class, ideology, hegemony and agency to the forefront of youth research.⁶⁹

Section II – Part 1: Critiques of the Birmingham School

While the CCCS research was highly influential, it did not go uncriticized – rather, a number of important critiques were lauded against the Birmingham School⁷⁰, with two of the

most major critiques coming from researchers *within* the CCCS. The first of these critiques came in the form of a feminist revisioning of cultural studies as offered in the 1978 publication of *Women Take Issue: Aspects of Women’s Subordination* by the

⁶⁸ This is owed, in part, to the different understandings of culture and socialization utilized in Mead’s work and in the work of the Birmingham School. Indeed, as Lave *et al.* note, “CCCS work makes notions of cultural transmission historically and theoretically complex. Culture is something to be produced, to be struggled over, not to be received sacramentally like ordination,” (1991:277). This is in contrast to earlier anthropological notions of socialization which assumed that socialization processes, “provided the social glue, the sources of continuity and uniformity of shared culture cross generations,” (1991:257).

⁶⁹ The breadth and depth of this impact is reflected in current ethnographic work on youth culture which overwhelmingly traces its historical roots back to the Birmingham School. Recent excellent examples of work continuing in the Birmingham tradition are Sunaina Maira’s *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City* (2002), Elizabeth Chin’s *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture* (2001), and especially Julie Bettie’s *Women Without Class: Girls, Race and Identity*.

⁷⁰ The Birmingham School came under fire for failing to adequately address issues of gender and race, for privileging class over other constitutive identities, for romanticizing resistance and for focusing on ‘visually spectacular’ subcultures in lieu of other more visually ‘common’ yet equally complex social groups (Turner, 1996; Lave, 1991 and Buchlotz, 2002).

feminist collective (the Women's Studies Group) at CCCS. The authors in this volume sought to carve out an intellectual space for feminist research both in cultural studies as a discipline and at the CCCS as a scholarly 'site'⁷¹. The work in this volume⁷² posited that the Birmingham School focused on class at the expense of other constitutive identities such as gender and attempted to redress this by urging cultural studies to take more seriously, "the 'personal' dimensions of culture, and 'the problematic of femininity'," (Turner, 1996:225).

Within this feminist collective it was Angela McRobbie who, in her article entitled "Settling Accounts with Subcultures: A Feminist Critique"⁷³, took issue with the masculine bias in subculture research in general, and Willis and Hebdige's pieces in particular. According to McRobbie, Willis failed to confront the ways in which the 'violent underpinning' and 'aggressive masculinity' of his lads were verbally articulated against the women and girls who occupied the silent margins of Willis's study. He also failed to adequately explore the role of the family or 'private sphere' in the reproduction of working class cultures, which McRobbie notes, occurs equally in such markedly 'feminine' spaces as 'the breakfast table' and the 'bedroom'.

⁷¹ The Women's Studies Group articulated this dual intervention when they stated, "We found it extremely difficult to participate in CCCS groups and felt, without being able to articulate it, that it was a case of the masculine domination of both intellectual work and the environment in which it was being carried out." (1978:15). Later, Stuart Hall would echo this sentiment when reflecting that, "we were opening the door to feminist studies, being good, transformed men. And yet, when it broke in through the window, every single unsuspected resistance rose to the surface – fully installed patriarchal power, which believed it had disavowed itself." (1992:282).

⁷² And later the second publication by the Women's Studies Group entitled *Off-Centre: Feminism and Cultural Studies* (1991).

⁷³ And earlier in her article entitled "Girls and Subcultures" (coauthored with Jenny Garber) which appeared in Hall and Jefferson's *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976).

In regards to Hebdige's work, McRobbie applauds his centralization of race, but notes that, "the sheer partiality of extrapolating race as signifier *par excellence* makes that which he chooses *not* to deal with [namely, gender,] all the more shocking," (2000:32 – emphasis in original). In Hebdige's failure to explore subcultural style as claiming a "male but never unambiguously masculine prerogative," (McRobbie, 2000:34) McRobbie asserts that he has missed the opportunity to address and complicate, "questions of sexuality, masculinity and the apparent redundancy of women in most subcultures," (ibid.). McRobbie's critique of Hebdige actually threatens the very foundation of his thesis, as Graeme Turner notes, "if subcultures reproduce the dominant structures of gender relations in their primarily masculine styles, then Hebdige's argument about the oppositional and resistant force of these styles is compromised," (Turner, 1996:166). This work thus marked a turning point in cultural studies' conceptualizations of gender in youth subcultures⁷⁴.

A similar collectivist intervention into the CCCS research was produced around issues of race, ethnicity and nationalism with the publications of *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State, and Law and Order* (1978) and *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (1982)⁷⁵. In *Policing the Crisis* the authors attend to discourses of race and class utilized in media coverage of the 'mugging crisis' in London, exploring the intersections of race and class in the "ideological production of 'folk-devils'," (Lave 1991:269). The topic of race is picked up in *The Empire Strikes Back* in a way which

⁷⁴ For a thorough discussion of the feminist turn in CCCS research, as well as explorations of later work in this domain, see *Feminism and Youth Culture* (McRobbie, 2000).

⁷⁵ And like the feminist intervention, researchers in this collective had "to overcome resistance from *within* cultural studies" (Turner, 1996:227 – my emphasis) which had marginalized racial issues.

argues for the centrality of race in cultural studies, “not against the dominance of class but, rather, against the dominance of the Gramscian model of the ‘national-popular’,” (Turner 1996:227)⁷⁶. As Gilroy explains in his introduction to *Empire*,

There are many reasons why issues raised by the study of ‘races’ and racism should be central to the concerns of cultural studies. Yet racist ideologies and racist conflicts have been ignored, both in historical writing and in accounts of the present. If nothing else, this book should be taken as a sign that this marginalization cannot continue. It has also been conceived as a corrective to the narrowness of the English left whose versions of the national-popular continues to deny the roles of blacks and black struggles in the making and remaking of the working class. [1982:7]

These two texts (as well as Gilroy’s later work)⁷⁷ constituted a powerful critique of, and intervention into, the ways in which cultural studies marginalized and took for granted an unquestionably central aspect of cultural life for youth and adults alike.

In addition to these important revisions, the Birmingham School also came under fire for romanticizing resistance (Walker, 1986) while simultaneously limiting its on-the-ground effects. For the CCCS researchers, subcultural resistance - especially its most ‘visibly spectacular’ forms - expresses agentive youth identities, yet it’s potential ‘radical’ effects are necessarily limited. As Clarke *et al.* portend, “there is no ‘subcultural solution’ to working-class youth unemployment ... sub-cultural strategies

⁷⁶ As Andrew Pearmain explains, “for Gramsci, the national-popular is a key element within the process of hegemony, whereby a particular social group represents its own interests as those of the whole nation. The success of this hegemonic project is measured by the extent to which other subordinate or ‘subaltern’ social groups accept this new ‘settlement’, more or less voluntarily, and are drawn into a ‘historic bloc’ around the dominant elite,” (2008:91).

⁷⁷ Especially his seminal text *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (1987) which argues that it is not British Cultural Studies’ focus on class, but rather their implicit nationalism, which accounts for the “invisibility of race within cultural criticism,” (Turner, 1996:228). As a result, according to Gilroy, “what must be challenged is the way that... apparently unique customs and practices are understood as expressions of a pure and homogenous nationality,” (1987:68).

cannot match, meet or answer the structuring dimensions emerging in this period for the class as a whole,” (1976:47). In other words,

for all the symbolic creativity represented by post-war subcultures, resistance *does not and cannot* alter the fundamentally class-based order of society. Subcultures ‘solve’, but *in an imaginary way*, problems which at the concrete material level remain unsolved.⁷⁸ [Bennett & Kahn-Harris, 2004:6 – my emphasis]

This is what researchers have referred to as a ‘familiar narrative’ of the Birmingham Centre, “that subcultural empowerment is empowerment without a future,” (Gelder 1997:87). Or perhaps more precisely, subcultural empowerment is empowerment that may ultimately reproduce dominant cultural forms. Indeed, this idea characterizes much of the CCCS work, and has been subject to much critique by later subculture scholars.⁷⁹

Taken together, these critiques and interventions into issues of gender, race, and resistance constitute a project of ‘revisioning’ youth culture studies - drawing attention to the frameworks in use by youth researchers, and delineating how the lenses we use necessarily limit the ways in which we are able to ‘see’ youth. It is these structuring characteristics of the *approach* to youth studies which captures the attention of a range of scholars working in the social sciences in the 1980s and 1990s. During this time the questions posed by researchers in the “nurture camp” (such as The Birmingham School and other scholars in the social sciences) began to be taken up by those in the “nature

⁷⁸ Though I’ll argue in Chapter Five, that the Crew’s self-produced safety net did attempt to alleviate (if not solve) structural and material problems.

⁷⁹ As Maira and Soep note, “a common cultural studies argument...is that even apparently progressive cultural forms can in fact be complicit with the very forces participants aim to overthrow. And while this argument may lead academics to throw up their hands in theoretical fatigue, there is still value in drawing attention to the fact that this is how power, in relations of race, gender and nation, continues to operate,” (2005:xxxix).

camp”, in disciplines such as psychology. The following section explores how scholars working in this arena began to ‘shift the focus’ of their analytical lenses in explorations of adolescent development.

Section II – Part 2: Re-envisioning Developmental Frameworks

Earlier in this chapter I discussed the field of developmental psychology, and noted its four overarching theoretical frameworks: biological-maturationist, behaviorist, cognitive-developmental and cultural-historical. In particular, the cultural-historical paradigm illustrated early on in the work of Vygotsky, and later explored by Erik Erikson and his work in the Culture and Personality Movement, is concerned with exploring the links between the ‘outside’ (nurture) and ‘inside’ (nature) of adolescent development. As such, it seeks to situate and understand the individual’s development within a social framework, exploring the interplay between the individual and the larger context in which he/she is developing. While the early 1980s witnessed critiques of the Birmingham School which sought to bring attention to the multiple constitutive identities of youth, urging for the class focus to be supplemented with equal attention to gender and race –these questions were simultaneously brought to bear on the ‘cultural-historical’ approach to youth development in the field of psychology.

The first such intervention into developmental frameworks was presented in the groundbreaking work of Carol Gilligan who, in 1982, published *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*. Concerned with the ways in which

developmental theory seemed to misarticulate or ignore key issues for women, Gilligan viewed gender as the missing piece in theories of development.⁸⁰ As she notes,

The disparity between women's experience and the representation of human development, noted throughout the psychological literature, has generally been seen to signify a problem in women's development. Instead, the failure of women to fit existing models of human growth may point to a *problem in the representation, a limitation in the conception of human condition*, an omission of certain truths about life. (1982:1 – my emphasis)

What Gilligan sought to propose was a crucial shift which reframed the “problem” in women's development as a problem in the *theory*, or developmental frameworks in use, rather than in women themselves. The goal of this intervention was to explore issues which surfaced repeatedly in psychological explorations of women and to frame them not as aberrations of development, but instead as evidence of a different developmental trajectory altogether.⁸¹

⁸⁰ In her work, Gilligan sought, “to expand the understanding of human development by using the group left out *in the construction of theory* to call attention to what is missing in its account,” (1982:4 – my emphasis). For Gilligan, gender was the missing piece in the developmental puzzle. According to Gilligan, while earlier developmental theorists, such as Freud and Erikson, had noted the “developmental differences” between men and women, their ‘developmental subject’ remained unambiguously male, and their ‘developmental goals’ - be it a resolution of the Oedipal complex (Freud) or Erikson's focus on the individual's need to “learn and master the technology of their culture,” (Gilligan:12) - were unambiguously masculine. That women came to these tasks, and moved through them, at different moments and in different ways did not lead to a revisioning of developmental theory but rather presented gendered developmental differences in a problem-focused negative light. As Gilligan notes, “To the girl, Freud explains, puberty brings a new awareness of ‘the wound to her narcissism’ and leads her to develop, ‘like a scar, a sense of inferiority’. Since in Erik Erikson's expansion of Freud's psychoanalytic account, adolescence is the time when development hinges on identity, the girl arrives at this juncture either psychologically at risk or with a different agenda,” (1982:11 – quoting Freud).

⁸¹ Gilligan later focused this approach specifically on the adolescent female subject in *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School* (1991). Positing that, “adolescence seems a watershed in female development, a time when girls are in danger of drowning or disappearing,” (Gilligan, Lyons & Hanmer,

Both *In A Different Voice* (1982) and Gilligan's later work on gender and development in *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School* (1991), garnered quite a bit of media attention as the topic of gender and development was taken up by people outside of developmental psychology and outside of academia altogether. The hugely successful publication of Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (1994) is an example of how these questions were translated into a larger cultural discussion, captivating the attention of a range of people who interacted with the 'adolescent female' – teachers, social workers and parents. While successful in turning the developmental lens on the female adolescent experience, this mainstream work also came under critique for the things it ignored and obscured. As youth researcher Julie Bettie noted in her discussion of Pipher's text, "gender appears here as the most significant dimension of girls' selves, leaving race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality analytically subordinate," (2003:5).

Despite the analytic flaws in both Pipher and Gilligan's texts, such work was successful in raising questions about the universality of developmental discourse.

Positing that the developmental 'subject' in - and the developmental 'norms' of -

1989:10) the researchers in this study sought to intervene in what they identified as a, "startling omission...the absence of girls from the major studies of adolescence," (1989:1). They conducted qualitative research with these girls – who the authors freely admit are not "representative of girls in general" (1989:2) as they were primarily white and upper-class – on their understandings of themselves and their relationships with others, on attachment and leadership, morality, eating disorders, racial identity formation and sexual choices. Finding that the qualities or characteristics one was supposed to obtain through traditional developmental models – such as a strong sense of individualism - were actually at odds with (what they posited somewhat unproblematically as) 'feminine' characteristics – such as a focus on connection and relationships with others - led the researchers to declare that, "adolescence is a critical time in girls' lives – a time when girls are in danger of losing their voices and thus losing connection with others," (1989:25).

psychology were implicitly male, heterosexual, white, middle-class and Western, Gilligan's legacy is defined by the crucial questions she raised about utilizing traditional developmental models when working with youth populations that fell outside of such classifications. Could developmental models 'work' when applied to those youth who were not male, heterosexual, white, middle-class or Western? Following this line of questioning, researchers began exploring the efficacy of youth development models for other and *othered* youth populations such as ethnic-minority youth and sexual-minority youth.⁸² As researchers writing about youth of color development have noted,

Historically, research on youth of color has been characterized by recurring conceptual flaws...Often, these populations are labeled as 'nonnormative' or implicitly viewed as 'pathological'. The characteristics of the majority group, White Americans, are typically viewed as the normative standard by which all non-White groups should be judged. For youth of color, and particularly African American youth, normative developmental experiences are often ignored or misunderstood. (Swanson et al, 2003:745 – citing Spencer & Harpalani, 2001).

Thus, from the 1980s onward, a plethora of research was undertaken with the goal of constructing alternative developmental models for youth who fell outside the purview of original developmental theories. Here the discourse of "youth development" was eclipsed by a multitude of developmental models for different groups of youth, where new developmental norms were assumed to be attuned to important differences between youth.⁸³

⁸² And, later, explorations of 'ethnic-minority sexual-minority youth' - see for instance: Dube & Savin-Williams (1999 & 2001); Kumashiro (2001); Monteiro & Fuqua (1995); and Sears (1995).

⁸³ For discussion of ethnic-minority youth development see Adams, Gullotta & Montemayor (1992); Feldman & Elliott (1990); Phinney & Rotheram (1987); Suarez-Orozco (1995); Taylor & Wang (1997); Weis & Fine (2000); Brookins (1996); Brice Heath & McLaughlin (1993); Miller (1999); Plummer (1995); Reese (1998); Spencer (1990); Stevens (1997); Watson & Protinsky (1988). For discussion of sexual minority

While this scholarship brought attention to how ‘other’ groups of youth may develop ‘differently’, *it simultaneously reinforced the use of the white/male/Western/middle-class youth as the ‘unmarked’ subject of youth development in their construction of ‘other’ models*. For even as researchers noted that youth who were ignored, marginalized or ‘othered’ in traditional youth development models might be misdiagnosed as developmentally aberrant, their solution lay in proposing more developmental norms differentiated by ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation *rather than seeking to dissolve or interrogate the notions of developmental ‘norms’ in the first place*. Thus while the intent of such research was to highlight and address the biases in developmental models, this work did not challenge the notion of ‘development’ as a fundamental concept.

This is, undoubtedly, a larger project to undertake in that it calls into question the very foundations of youth development, and psychology as a field of inquiry. Yet such a project was begun around this same time by scholars utilizing a post-structuralist approach to the history of psychology as a discipline. Utilizing a genealogical critique of psychology, this work to which we now turn our attention, would profoundly impact youth researchers in the 1990s. I begin with an introduction to the approach undertaken in this new arena, defining and identifying genealogy in relation to previous types of analysis.

youth development see D’Augelli & Patterson (2001); Savin-Williams (2005); Beaty (1999); Floyd & Stein (2002); Jolly (2000); Russell (2002); Zera (1992); Leck (1995).

Section II: Part 3 - Critiquing the Nature of 'Nature': A Genealogy of the Psy

Sciences

As is evident in the chapter thus far, 'youth' as a concept and category is decidedly variable across the disciplines, difficult to define in any stable manner and produced by researchers in highly contested ways. As a result, some scholars have suggested identifying the term 'youth' as a linguistic shifter (Durham, 2000; Bucholtz, 2002), or that which is essentially meaningless outside of the context and situation of its use. As explained by Bucholtz, "the referential function of youth cannot be determined in advance of its use in a particular cultural context, and its use *indexes the nature of the context in which it is invoked*," (2002:528 – my emphasis). Thus, in any context, 'youth' is a social construction – it comes into meaning in situated moments through a complex set of discourses and institutional practices.

One approach scholars have utilized in exploring and understanding youth as a 'shifting' category is to create a critical history of the discourses about youth. A second approach and method of analysis is what Foucault called genealogy. As Foucault clarifies;

Critical and genealogical descriptions are to alternate, support and complete each other. The critical side of the analysis deals with the system's enveloping discourse; attempting to mark out and distinguish the principles of ordering, exclusion and rarity in discourse....The genealogical side of analysis, by way of contrast, deals with series of effective formation of discourse: it attempts to grasp it in its power of affirmation... *the power of constituting a domain of objects*, in relation to which one can affirm or deny true or false propositions. [1970:234 – my emphasis]

As the above quote elucidates, genealogy as an analytical method is concerned with the institutional practices which create a knowable object and establish the limits within

which that object can be known. As Foucauldian scholar Nikolas Rose clarifies, such an approach, “involves the attempt to try to trace, in very concrete and material forms, the actual history of those forms of rationality that comprise our present,” (1989:X) and construct certain objects as knowable. The objects themselves, such as ‘youth’, are understood in the social sciences not as inherent, ‘natural’ or stable, but as ‘socially constructed’. Those concerned with genealogy take this concept further, situating and exploring the process and effects of such construction through the positing of questions such as, “where do objects emerge? Which are the authorities who are able to pronounce upon them? Through what concepts and explanatory regimes are they specified? [And] how do certain constructions acquire the status of truth?” (Rose, 1989:X).

In this tradition, sociologist Nikolas Rose published *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, which was concerned with contributing to the “genealogy of subjectivity” (1989:VII), or the unearthing of the modes and frameworks through which the ‘self’ is constituted as a knowable object. Utilizing a Foucauldian framework, Rose posits that the processes and technologies of subjectification and individualization utilized in the ‘psy sciences’ (psychology and the like) have come to constitute the primary framework for constructing and understanding subjectivity.⁸⁴ Here the ‘self’ is

⁸⁴ As Foucauldian scholars Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow note, “Foucault thinks that the study of human beings took a decisive turn at the end of the eighteenth century when human beings came to be interpreted as knowing subjects, and, at the same time, objects of their own knowledge,” (1982:xix). For Rose, the dual articulation of ‘self as knowable object’ and ‘self as knowing self’ precipitated in this historical moment is characterized in the formation and impact of the psy sciences. According to Rose, “psy acquires a particular significance within contemporary western forms of life, which have come to celebrate values of autonomy and self-realization that are essentially psychological in form and structure. These values establish and delimit our sense of what it is to be a human being...That is to say, however apparently external and implacable may be the constraints, obstacles and limitations that are encountered, each individual must render

viewed as a domain constructed *through* a specific set of institutional practices and discourses, fashioned in particular ways and lending itself to certain types of knowledge and specific forms of regulation. In other words, the psy sciences create ‘governable subjects’, subjects constructed in and through particular discourses and institutional practices, who are then regulated and governed, “within these practices and apparatuses in ways that appear to be based, not upon arbitrary authority, but upon the real nature of humans as psychological subjects,” (1989:VIII).⁸⁵ In elucidating how strategies of governance articulate themselves through the discursive categories which constitute governable subjects, Rose posits that psy-based, “forms of regulation do not crush subjectivity. They actually *fabricate* subjects,” (1989:viii – my emphasis).

For Rose one of the central ‘governable subjects’ fabricated in and through the psy discourses and practices is that of the “child”. Rose’s use of this particular term is important as ‘child’ is most often used to denote a younger person than the term ‘youth’, which can be used to refer to both young children as well as adolescents. While ‘youth’ may operate as a floating signifier,⁸⁶ infused with meaning in a variety of ways in different contexts, ‘child’ takes its meaning from, and I would argue *always indexes*, the framework of the ‘family’. Indeed, in referring to the ‘child’ Rose implicitly links this

his or her life meaningful as if it were the outcome of individual choices made in furtherance of a biographical project of self-realization,” (1989:vii-ix).

⁸⁵ In exploring ‘governance’ Rose is drawing from Foucault’s work on governmentality. As Rose explains, in the Foucauldian conceptualization, government is “understood as ‘the conduct of conduct’: programmes, strategies, techniques for acting upon the action of others towards certain ends,” (1989:xxi). At its most basic ‘governance’ here refers to the organization and administration of individuals and groups (populations) through “a variety of human technologies” (1989:viii) in the “practical management of human beings” (ibid.). For a more thorough description of governmentality see Foucault (1991) and Gordon (1991).

⁸⁶ Levi-Strauss coined the phrase ‘floating signifier’ to denote a term which is “in itself void of meaning and thus apt to receive any meaning,” (1987:63-64).

being to the larger structure of the family, and this becomes central to his analytical interrogation of the family as what Foucault referred to as a ‘privileged segment’ and instrument (or ‘human technology’) in the governing of populations. As Rose details,

The domesticated private family was both to be distinguished from political life and to be defined and privileged by law; it was to be both freed from detailed prescriptions of conduct and to be permeable to moralization and normalization from the outside. *It was to become the matrix for the government of the social economy.* [1989:129 – my emphasis]

In this matrix Rose contends that the child became both “an idea and a target” (1989:123) of government and expertise. These experts who were primarily drawn from the ‘psy sciences’ – such as psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis⁸⁷ - constructed the dominant lens through which youth were – and have continued to be – viewed. As youth researcher Christine Griffin notes, “psychological understandings have dominated representations of ‘youth’ in general, and in the construction of certain young people as ‘social problems’,” (1993:5). While not a ‘youth researcher’ himself, Rose’s genealogical exploration and historical scrutinization of the psy sciences as a particular ‘regime of truth’ destabilizes this primary mode of understanding youth and creates the conditions for further intervention by those situated within the youth research field.⁸⁸ As such, a discussion of his primary points is in order.

⁸⁷ Rose specifies that ‘psy’ refers to, “the heterogeneous knowledges, forms of authority and practical techniques that constitute psychological expertise,” (1989:vii). In addition to psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis, we could now include social work and other ‘counseling sciences’ as part of the ‘psy’ tradition which takes as its object of knowledge, and target of action, the inner workings of ‘the self’.

⁸⁸ As Rose notes, “the aim of such genealogies is a kind of destabilization or de-fatalization of our present. In describing its contingency, in therefore opening the possibility that things have been different, could have been different, they try to make it easier to assess that present in order to make judgements about how to act upon it,” (1989:xii).

Rose on Youth, Normalization and the Fabrication of ‘Governable Subjects’

In *Governing The Soul*, Rose begins his section on youth with the arresting proposition that, “childhood is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence,” (1989:123). He describes a ‘panoply of programs’ – financial, pedagogical and legislative – which arose in the nineteenth century and centered on children. Taking issue with the notion that such welfare mechanisms and social services were evidence that citizenship rights had been extended to the child, Rose instead argues that these policies and programs actually attempted to, “extend social control over potentially troublesome sectors of society,” (1989:125)⁸⁹ which included children who were viewed as problems *in potentia*. This is in contrast to the argument of T.H.Marshall and other sociologists that such programs and policies were recognizing the child as a “citizen *in potentia*” (Rose, 1989:124). It is important to note that the potential of youth to be and/or cause problems is still heavily in circulation today in research focusing on youth “at risk”. In the risk model, specific populations of youth are deemed to be at higher risk for a variety of problem behaviors by their inclusion in groups that have higher statistic frequencies of these behaviors. Thus, while individual youth in these groups may not be practicing problem behaviors, they are nevertheless marked as *at risk* of these behaviors simply by their membership in these groups.

⁸⁹ Indeed, this is his analysis of *all* welfare policies which he views as not stemming from the recognition of the social rights of citizens, but rather, “their goal has been to preserve the efficiency of those who provide necessary labour power and military might, to provide antidotes to social unrest, and to ward off demands for truly progressive measures of equalization of wealth and status. The policies and practices of welfare, far from extending citizenship in any benign sense, have in fact functioned to maintain inequality,” (1989:125).

In this conceptualization, members of such groups pose a ‘risk’ to themselves, but also – perhaps more importantly – they pose a risk to society. As Rose explains,

Children came to the attention of social authorities as delinquents threatening property and security, as future workers requiring moralization and skills, as future soldiers requiring a level of physical fitness – in other words on account of *the threat which they posed now or in the future to the welfare of the state*. (1989:125 – my emphasis)

As a result, complex programs of normalization and socialization were enacted upon children through the field of medicine, the juvenile court and the child guidance clinic.⁹⁰

This “tutelary complex” of “doctors, psychologists, probation officers, and social workers,” (Rose, 1989:131) sought to implant moralized standards of behavior into families to produce ‘normal’ children able to fulfill their future roles as workers, soldiers and parents. It is this idea of the ‘normal child’ which concerns Rose, who states that, “normality is not an observation but a valuation...[containing] not only a judgment about what is desirable, but an injunction as to a goal to be achieved,” (1989:133).⁹¹ And according to Rose, it is psychologists who have constructed this goal through providing the vocabulary, frameworks, and ‘technologies of childhood regulation’ and normalization.

Such technologies of regulation and normalization were predicated on psychology as a science of individualization. Rose notes that in the nineteenth century the ‘individualizing gaze’ had focused on the deviants in society in an attempt to ‘discipline

⁹⁰ In particular, these programs targeted “troubled and troublesome children,” (1989:131) especially those in working class families (see Rose 1989:129-132).

⁹¹ Importantly, Rose notes that, “it is around pathological children – the troublesome, the recalcitrant, the delinquent – that conceptions of normality have taken shape. It is not that a knowledge of the normal course of development of the child has enabled experts to become more skilled at identifying those unfortunate children who are in some way abnormal. Rather, expert notions of normality are extrapolated from our attention to those children who worry the courts, teachers, doctors, and parents” (1989:133).

their difference'. During this time industrialization and mandatory education brought large numbers of people together in one space, constituting a field of sight, or what Rose refers to as a 'regime of visibility'. Here people could be watched and their behaviors and difference could be visually registered. Occurring simultaneously in the nineteenth century was the creation of systems for documenting information on individuals within these institutions – the case file. Thus Rose notes that,

the individual entered the field of knowledge not through any abstract leap of the philosophical imagination, but through the mundane operation of bureaucratic documentation. The sciences of individualization took off from these routine techniques of recording, utilizing them, transforming them into systematic devices for the inscription of identity, techniques that could translate the properties, capacities, energies of the human soul into material form – pictures, charts, diagrams, measurements. (1989:137)

These material measurements, known as psychometrics, became a primary organizer in the psy sciences. Rose posits that while earlier Lombroso-esque ideas of degeneracy and deviance had posited that the "grammar of the body" (1989:138) could be read as a text showing these aspects visually, it soon became clear that there were pathologies, "not clearly inscribed upon the surface of the body" (1989:139). The psy sciences took up this issue, attempting new strategies, technologies and measurements for reading and making legible the pathologies which had "reced[ed] into the interiority of the soul" (1989:140). Intelligence testing was the first such strategy.⁹²

⁹² Indeed, as Rose notes, "the first contribution of psychology to the project of individualization was the psychological test of intelligence...[which] was a means of visualizing, disciplining, and inscribing a difference that did not rely upon the surface of the body as the diagnostic intermediary between conduct and the psyche," (1989:139).

Alfred Binet began work on intelligence testing for children as a means through which to identify the ‘feeble minded’ child⁹³. In contrast to earlier intelligence testing (such as that proposed by eugenicist psychologist Francis Galton) what was striking about Binet’s testing was his focus on, and centralization of, age. Binet believed that, “despite variations between individuals, norms of performance could be established for children at particular ages,” (1989: 142). For Rose, what is noteworthy about the construction of age based norms was that this transformed psychometrics, “from a technique for diagnosing the pathological into a *device for creating a hierarchy of the normal*,” (1989:142 – my emphasis). By transforming the individual, “into writing as numbers, quotients, scores, profiles...[psychometrics made] the individual knowable, calculable and administrable, to the extent that he or she may be differentiated from others and evaluated in relation to them,” (143). In other words they make the individual *legible* within a framework of age-based norms. These norms are later joined by, and furthered through, theories of development.

Rose notes that prior to the construction of a developmental science, children grew and changed, but, “it was by no means self evident that a systematic knowledge of childhood should be grounded in the notion that their attributes should be linked along the dimension of time in a unified sequence,” (1989:144). The use of time as an organizing principle in scientific analysis is, according to Rose, a development unique to

⁹³ According to Rose, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, “the feeble-minded child, and the adult that he or she would become, appeared to be a major social threat. Eugenists saw the feeble-minded as a central element in the degeneracy or deterioration of the race...In short, curbing their reproduction, by segregation or sterilization, was a matter of urgency, and hence their detection and ascertainment was a priority,” (1989:139).

the late 19th and early 20th century, and is central to the developmental sciences.⁹⁴ In particular, Rose points to the pioneering work of Arnold Gesell as providing a key foundation in the construction of developmental theories by transforming children into scientifically legible material. Gesell accomplished this through studying children in a unique type of lab which was, “a dome brilliantly lit within and designed for one way vision,” (1989:147) where the psychologist sat outside the dome and observed the child within, aided by technologies such as film and photography. For Rose, “the child is here caught up within a complicated arrangement that will transform it into a visible, observable and analyzable object, within a particular rational scientific discourse (developmental psychology) making a particular kind of claim upon our attention, a claim to truth,” (1989:147).

Gesell transformed actual children who grow and change and are essentially “unstable material for a science to work on,” (1989:147) into material inscriptions – graphs, charts and photographs. Gesell’s use of photography and film in his lab allowed for behavior to be analyzed in slow motion, and replayed over and over, creating a “stable two dimensional plane” (1989:147) which could be moved, put in different

⁹⁴ According to Rose, during this time, “a new scientific gaze focused up on the young child from the perspective of evolution,” (145). This evolutionary paradigm, discussed earlier in the paper and linked to the work of G. Stanley Hall and Arnold Gessell, utilized the idea of ‘time’ as an organizing principle. According to Rose, during this era, time, “had become integral to the sciences of nature – why not also to the sciences of man?” (1989:145). While G. Stanley Hall had originally made a call for parents to observe their children, that idea was later dismissed and instead a scientific field known as developmental psychology was “made possible by the clinic and the nursery school” (1989:145) where large numbers of children of the same age could be observed which allowed for “standardization” (a “norm was a standard based upon the average abilities or performances of children of a certain age on a particular task or specified activity,” (ibid.)) and ‘normalization’ against which individuals were measured.

sequences and combinations and easily analyzed for ‘atypicality’. Rose notes that this move from actual child to such ‘disciplined frames’ is not a move from concrete to abstract but the opposite, with the images as more stable and scientifically ‘real’ than the ever-changing elusive child. This concretization made the child’s behaviors and activities, “scientifically legible” materials which could be “assembled in various combinations in order to search out regularities. ‘Representative’ and ‘typical’ pictures could be differentiated from those that were ‘odd’, ‘unusual’ or ‘atypical’. *They could, that is to say, be normalized,*” (1989:148 – my emphasis).

An important point is that this process of inscription is not just the “documentation of a familiar reality,” (1989:153), rather, according to Rose, “technical developments make new areas of life practicable,” (ibid.). The scales used in developmental science thus, “constituted a normalizing vision of childhood that gained an ever wider purchase upon reality,” (1989:153) as they were made legible and disseminated to teachers, parents, and youth workers “in tabular and pictorial form to enable anyone to evaluate a child,” (1989:153). Thus Rose notes that,

In the space between the behaviors of actual children and the ideals of the norm, new desires and expectations, and new fears and anxieties could be inspired in parents, new administrative and reformatory aspirations awakened in professionals. With the rise of a normative expertise of childhood, family life and subjectivity could be governed in a new way. (1989:153-4)

Thus, Rose crucially links the governing of children and youth to the discourses of normality extrapolated by these new ‘experts’ of human nature. In doing so he situates psychology within the broader social context in which it comes about, illustrating that how we come to know ‘youth’ as psychological subjects is contingent on a particular way

of viewing and understanding our world and ourselves that has its roots in the unique historical context which produced the developmental sciences and their technologies for evaluation, normalization, and regulation. As such, psychology and its constitutive ‘norms’ are presented as just one way of viewing and understanding youth. That this perspective has come to be the primary way we understand youth, constituting an hegemony in discourses on youth, can now be understood not as ‘natural’ or ‘common sense’ but as a historically contingent and socio-politically situated framework produced and reproduced by invested agents known as ‘youth experts’ in a variety of fields and disciplines under the umbrella of ‘youth studies’.

While I have traced youth studies from its earliest interest in individual youth to its later preoccupation with youth cultures, the 1990s witness a major shift where researchers are turning their attention onto youth studies itself. That is, as Christine Griffin notes, “youth research does not simply reflect aspects of young people’s lives, nor does it merely *misrepresent* their experiences... Youth research is more complex than this, given the ideological role it plays in constructing the very categories of ‘youth’ and ‘adolescence’,” (1993:2 – emphasis in original). The researchers we turn our attention to in the next chapter are concerned with tracing not only the historical construction of ‘youth’ in and through the social sciences, but also the *effects* of these conceptualizations of youth in policy formation, educational and governing strategies, and cultural discussions. By turning their attention to researchers as *producers* of ‘youth’, these scholars mark a pivotal turning point in the lineage of youth studies.

CHAPTER 3

INTERVENTIONS: CRITICAL YOUTH STUDIES, ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC COLLABORATION

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section deals with a group of scholars involved in what I call Critical Youth Studies (CYS). Concerned with contextualizing and situating the historical construction of youth in the social sciences, and critiquing ‘youth studies’ as a field of expertise, the work of the YYS researchers marks a pivotal turning point in youth studies. The researchers in this section seek to explore ‘youth’ as a subject constructed in and through a variety of discourses, which come to be known and understood within a specific set of frameworks, and which lends itself to particular forms of regulation in a multiplicity of sites. In turning their attention to the expert discourses at play in the field of youth studies, the Critical Youth Studies (CYS) scholars problematize our concept of ‘youth’ through a focus on three aspects of youth research: discourse, context and effects. In exploring the ways ‘youth’ has been constructed in youth studies (discourse), by situating the work of youth researchers at specific historical moments (context) and tracing the consequences of ideological conceptualizations of ‘youth’ into policy and governing strategies (effects), the YYS researchers locate both ‘youth studies’ and that which it produces (this subject known as ‘youth’) within a complex and historically situated ‘web of power’.

After reviewing the paradigm shifts introduced by YYS scholars, I turn to the second section of the chapter, exploring the contours of the youth studies field since these important interventions, focusing in particular on the youth research carried out in anthropology as the most promising venue for furthering and building upon the legacy of

Critical Youth Studies in the social sciences. I will argue that it is anthropological methodologies – in particular, *ethnography* – which offers the best mode for operationalizing the theoretical frameworks produced by CYS. Finally, I will turn to a review of the calls for more collaborative ethnographic research projects within youth studies. All together, it is the work reviewed in this chapter which has had the most profound influence on both the analytic frameworks, as well as the methods, used in my research.

Critical Youth Studies Section 1: Foucault and the ‘Problematization’ of Adolescence

The CYS researchers take what youth studies theorist Peter Kelly (drawing from Foucault) terms a ‘problematizing’ approach to youth studies, which he characterizes as focused “on the institutionalized processes of abstraction which construct representations of youth in the institutional domain of youth studies,” (2000:302) and which explores, “the implication of these processes in the regulation of populations of young people; *populations which are rendered knowable in all their diversity through the activities of those who do youth studies,*” (ibid. – my emphasis).⁹⁵ In other words, it is in fact through the ‘doing of youth studies’, that youth become knowable – as an ‘artifact of expertise’ (Kelly, 2000) – and thus also subject to increased surveillance and regulation – as an

⁹⁵ Kelly draws his understanding of a ‘problematizing’ practice from Mitchell Dean’s work on ‘critical and effective histories’, or what Foucault referred to as ‘histories of the present’, which is a, “form of intellectual practice...grounded in an analysis ‘of the trajectory of the historical forms of truth and knowledge without origin or end’. This intellectual practice retains its critical impulse by dint of its refusal of ‘taken-for-granted components of our reality and the ‘official’ accounts of how they come to be what they are’,” (Kelly, 2000:309 – quoting Dean, 1994)

‘artifact of government’ (Tait, 1992). The CYS scholars explore how governmentality operates within and through youth via these expert discourses.

This focus on governmentality in youth studies originated in scholarship centered on youth subcultures in the early 1990s. In particular, these questions entered the academic arena in with the 1992 publication of Gordon Tait’s article “Re-Assessing Street Kids: A Critique of Subculture Theory” in the journal *Youth Studies Australia*. Here, Tait posited that despite the decade of critiques of the Birmingham School none of the previous criticisms “of subcultural analysis go so far as to challenge the foundations upon which it is built,” (1992:3). In contrast Tait contends that recent theoretical developments in the social sciences, and in particular the contributions of Michel Foucault, issue fundamental challenges against the underpinnings of subculture theory. In his article Tait seeks to wrest youth subculture studies from its theoretical groundings in Marxist, Gramscian and Althusserian interpretations of ideology and hegemony, and relocate it within a Foucauldian framework concerned with understanding youth as an artifact of government.

For Tait, Foucault’s work takes issue with the dominant Marxist and Gramscian understandings of hegemony which explore how the ruling class works upon the subordinate classes to achieve their consent to ruling ideologies. In contrast, Tait explains that Foucault “posits an alternative model centred around the construction of political technologies” (1992:3) where hegemony,

should not be understood in terms of force or coercion, *or even consent*, but rather as the manner in which techniques, routines and procedures subtly permeate cultural practices....*Hegemony is therefore to be understood in terms of the profusion of mechanisms through which events are constituted, practices are developed and bodies are rendered docile.* [1992:4 – my emphasis]

This profusion of mechanisms is part and parcel of the process which Foucault refers to as ‘governmentalization’.⁹⁶ Tait takes up Foucault’s concern with governmentalization and situates it in contrast to the Birmingham School approach that focused on the resistances of working-class youth subcultures against the ruling ideology. Drawing from Foucault, Tait says that “resistance cannot be aggregated and romanticized into a generalized, working-class opposition to the totalised power of the ruling classes,” (1992:4). Rather, he states that it is “only against the techniques of power employed in everyday life and relevant to particular contexts, that the notion of resistance can be properly understood. *Therefore, the focus must fall on those forms of government which are operating on and through young people.*” (ibid.- my emphasis).

Here Tait argues for a reinvisioning of youth subculture studies in light of Foucault’s work on governmentality where youth can be understood as an artifact of government, and youth subculture studies as part of a “multitude of regulatory practices and techniques” (1992:5) which position youth as knowable, readable and visible.

Invoking Nikolas Rose, Tait seeks to explore the

types of knowledge that locate youth, and more specifically ‘problem’ youth...as both a locus of anxiety and an object of visibility. Each plays a part in positioning youth...within a web of governmental intelligibility – an intelligibility based not solely upon humanitarianism and benevolence, but also upon *surveillance and political concern*. [1992:5 – my emphasis]

⁹⁶ What does Foucault mean by governmentalization? As he states in his seminal lecture published in *The Foucault Effect*, “The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this...form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security,” (1991:102).

In other words, expert discourses construct youth as an object of study capable of being ‘known’ and thus also capable of being *governed* and *regulated*. This does not mean that such expert discourses are repressive. Rather, the power of expert discourses is ‘positive’ in the Foucauldian sense – which is to say that it *produces* new forms of being and new objects of knowledge subject to new regulatory strategies. Tait posits that Foucault’s focus on power as producing not repression but rather ‘rituals of truth’ is a more “fertile ground for understanding the contemporary policing of youth, than the repeated recourse to the romantic and redundant ‘rituals of resistance’ described by the CCCS” (1992:6). By invoking Foucault and Nikolas Rose, Tait shifts the focus onto the theoretical frameworks in use by youth subculture theorists and their roles and effects in governing strategies. While specifically focusing on subculture studies, the issues raised in Tait’s article were projected onto ‘youth studies’ more generally through the debate which it provoked.

Indeed, the very next issue of *Youth Studies Australia* hosted a rebuttal to Tait’s arguments by Howard Sercombe entitled “Youth Theory: Marx or Foucault?”. Positing that the real issue of Tait’s article “seems to be the contest for the general theoretical ownership of the youth phenomenon,” (1992:1), Sercombe assesses Marxist and Foucauldian analyses of youth within the framework of applied youth studies, specifically focusing on the problems and potentials of these theoretical frameworks in effecting change in youths’ status and power. Situating himself as an ‘advocate’ on behalf of youth and youth rights, Sercombe says,

Foucault presents a powerful challenge here to people like me. Should advocates vacate the field, and mind their own business? Should researchers stop researching, and theorists stop theorizing, about youth? That is one option, and Foucault’s favoured one. He would be interested

rather in exposing the discourses and practices by which young people are constituted as ‘youth’, or as ‘homeless youth’, or as ‘delinquents’. His interest is in the theories of youth, not in improving their world for them. That is their job. The limit of his intervention is exposing the discourses that limit and chain them. (1992:4).

This is not only an over simplification of Foucault, but one which obscures the political ramification of making visible, and deconstructing, the role of expert discourses in the construction of the subject. For Foucault, and the Foucauldian scholars involved in Critical Youth Studies, this project of deconstruction and the attention to, and critique of, mainstream discourses is not anti-activism or anti-revolution, indeed, it may be conceptualized as laying a groundwork for activism.⁹⁷

It is this project of exposing, deconstructing and historicizing discourses that the Tait/Sercombe debate invokes – while aspects of it may be conceptualized as a ‘contest’ for ‘theoretical ownership’ – at its heart it pushes us to understand that the theoretical frameworks we use in viewing ‘youth’ conceptualize and construct the subject in specific ways which then have ‘real life’ effects in policy production and programming initiatives. Situating theories of youth allows us to understand their mobilization and effects within scholarship itself, within broader ‘activist’ movements (such as those that concern Sercombe) and within governing strategies and technologies. These issues become central to the Critical Youth Studies project where scholars are concerned with drawing attention to the theoretical frameworks utilized in youth research by elucidating the discourses and practices which construct ‘youth’ as an object of knowledge and a subject

⁹⁷ As Foucault himself noted, “critique doesn’t have to be the premise of a deduction which concludes: this then is what needs to be done. *It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal...It is a challenge directed at what is*” (1981:13 – my emphasis).

of governmentality. In particular there are two major texts which exemplify this approach: Christine Griffin's *Representations of Youth: The Study of Youth and Adolescence in Britain and America* (1993), and Johanna Wyn & Rob White's *Rethinking Youth* (1997).

Both Griffin and Wyn & White begin their projects by exploring, situating and problematizing "the concept of youth" (Wyn & White, 1997:8) by interrogating the dominant discourses through which youth come to be known. Griffin accomplishes this by interrogating the 'origin story' of adolescence by exploring the larger discourses and ideologies in circulation during the historical moment in which youth emerge as an object of scrutiny, and explaining their role in the construction of this new subject position. Wyn & White also explore the concept of youth, turning their attention to 'youth development' as a dominant discourse constructing youth in particular ways with mixed effects. Both Griffin and Wyn & White produce analyses capable of articulating youth as both a socially constructed and mediated object of knowledge *and* as a 'lived-in' subject position, through the use of a, "critical and self-reflexive perspective [which] directs the gaze of researchers (and readers) towards the historical and political contexts in which young people are living *and* in which researchers and policy makers are looking at something called 'youth'," (Griffin B). We begin by turning our attention to the earlier of these publications, Christine Griffin's *Representations of Youth*.

Critical Youth Studies Section 2: Critiquing the Origin Story of Adolescence

Griffin's book is concerned with the history of youth research with a special concentration on the research produced during the 1980s in the United States and Great

Britain⁹⁸. Before addressing this research, Griffin begins by positioning herself and identifying the three approaches and frameworks which guide her analysis: Gramsci's work on hegemony⁹⁹, post-structuralist approaches to discourse analysis¹⁰⁰, and feminist theories¹⁰¹. Griffin contends that, "contemporary youth research can be read in part as a reflection of hegemonic 'common sense' about 'youth' and 'adolescence'," (1993:6) which researchers take for granted. Simultaneously, youth research helps construct these 'common sense' ideas. According to Griffin,

This involves the construction of the age stage of 'youth' or 'adolescence' itself and distinctions between 'normal' and 'deviant' forms of adolescent behavior...Such notions are put together via a complex process of interaction between research funding agencies, academic career moves, research designs and techniques, publication of research 'results' – and the practices of young people and other adult groups with whom they are involved. [1993:6]

In continuing the specification of her approach to youth research Griffin draws a critical link between hegemony and discourse analysis, seeking to examine how, "discourses

⁹⁸ Griffin identifies the "overwhelming dominance" of British and US youth research as a form of "academic cultural imperialism," (1993:4). Nevertheless, it is precisely this dominance which compels Griffin to focus her attention on these sites, as "youth researchers outside Britain and the USA are frequently compelled to use [these] theories developed in these centers of western capitalism, which have minimal relevance to young people from different cultural and political contexts," (1993:4) as well as for different groups of youth within these sites.

⁹⁹ According to Griffin, "hegemony is concerned with the production and reproduction of forms of consciousness, as a form of domination which is imposed through a mixture of persuasion and coercion," (1993:6).

¹⁰⁰ In particular Griffin draws from the work of (what she identifies as) "materialist feminist versions of post-structuralism," (1993:7) which are concerned with attending to, "the ways in which specific discourses and discursive configurations can construct, marginalize, silence and reproduce certain concepts and arguments within particular structural relations of domination," (ibid.).

¹⁰¹ Griffin identifies certain approaches as 'feminist' including, "adopting a critical view of the relation between theory and practice," (1993:8) and producing analyses about interlocking systems of oppression where, "these sets of power relations interact, working against and with each other in different contexts, without necessarily viewing any *one* set of power relations as always overdetermining in all periods and all conditions," (ibid.).

have been used in contemporary youth research, focusing on sets of rhetorical connections through which certain arguments about (certain groups of) young people are produced,” (1993:8) and then naturalized – in part through the very research it generates – into hegemonic ‘common sense’ ideas. Lastly, she utilizes her grounding in feminist theory and practice to bring in a focus on power and identity, exploring, “the construction and dis/empowerment of ‘youth’ and of specific groups of young people in different strands of youth research,” (1993:9). Starting with the premise that, “research is never neutral territory,” (1993:9) Griffin seeks to identify the theoretical and ideological underpinnings which have informed and shaped a century’s worth of research on youth. In order to do so, Griffin returns to the turn of the century, to the influential work of G. Stanley Hall.

While other youth researchers credit Hall with the discovery of adolescence, Griffin interrogates this notion, taking a Foucauldian approach characteristic of the genealogy of ‘origins’ where we find that, “there is something altogether different behind things: not a timeless and essential secret but the secret that they have no essence, or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms,” (Foucault, 1994:371). Working counter to the idea that Hall was the originator of adolescence, Griffin posits that Hall,

merely synthesized a range of themes, assumptions and arguments in late nineteenth-century western ideologies... [and his] work reflects a particular combination of discourses around ‘race’, sexuality, gender, class, nation *and* age which were very much rooted in a specific historical moment. [1993:12]

In explanation, Griffin contends that, “most of the changes in young peoples’ lives which laid the foundations for the ‘discovery’ of adolescence occurred in the second half of the

nineteenth century with the onset of industrialization,” (1993:13). These changes included: the decline of domestic industries as factory production in cities expanded, the fragmentation of working class families as youth entered factory jobs, and the migration of 15-25 year olds to city factories (Griffin, 1993:12-13). Industrialization brought about economic and social changes including the need for a cheap labor force and the establishment of a compulsory education system. Earlier, pre-industrial European societies had made distinctions between child and adult based not upon chronological age, but rather on relations of dependency and separation from the family of origin (Griffin, 1993:12). As Griffin explains, the conditions of early industrialization forced some young people to stay longer in their homes while others left at earlier ages, thus these ‘distinctions of dependence’ (from family of origin) became blurred. Simultaneously, distinctions between adults and children based on employment outside of the home became void. It is this historical context which led several scholars to contend that, “the concept of adolescence emerged mainly as a result of capital’s demand for a cheap and youthful labor force, with the ideology of adolescence forged by fundamental changes in *class* relations,” (Griffin, 1993: 12). Yet, by exploring simultaneous shifts in the educational system, and the “coincident development of a muscular Christian form of masculinity,” (1993:12)¹⁰², Griffin contends that in Britain, “the ideology of adolescence lay at the heart of *an interaction between class, ‘race’*,

¹⁰² Griffin notes that, “the earlier model of the Latin school was akin to a monastery: women and ‘the feminine’ were to be avoided as potential sources of temptation for masculine (hetero)-sexuality. The new public school...was modeled on a military institution, associating women and the feminine with weakness and fragility, and men and masculinity with strength and virility,” (1993:12) – or what Griffin terms the ‘muscular Christian form of masculinity’.

gender and age relations,” (1993:13 – my emphasis) which she notes, “had important cultural and commercial connections across the Atlantic,” (ibid.).

In America the end of the 19th century also brought industrialization and mass migration to urban areas. In the newly diverse cities ‘melting pot’ ideologies emerged which were meant to subsume differences between minorities while still marking them as inferior to “the WASP norm,” (1993:14). According to Griffin,

the emerging ideology of adolescence made use of ‘racial’ themes which were based on assumptions about the supposedly natural superiority of Anglo-Saxon white European ‘stock’. The apparently universal nature of adolescence provided an illusory uniformity at a time when the construction of a united national identity and culture was of paramount importance for the Union¹⁰³. [1993:14 – citing Kett, 1997]

Additionally, in this era the United States witnessed an “intense Evangelical moralism and continuing cycles of revivalism,” (1993:14) and Griffin contends that these religious practices were central to the ‘discovery’ of adolescence. Previously ‘religious conversion’ was conceptualized as an important mark “of the transition to adulthood,” (ibid.), and Griffin notes that the ‘conversion narratives’ were ‘sharply differentiated’ by gender¹⁰⁴, providing a holy socialization into (gendered) adult roles. According to Griffin, Hall’s focus on adolescence as a ‘process of becoming’ and a ‘period of transition’ drew on these earlier ideas of spiritual conversion which,

presented adolescence as the key period of universal religious awakening. For Hall, the origin of religious conversion lay in the physiological changes at puberty: sexual awakening and the transition to ‘normal’ adult genital heterosexuality. *Hall shifted the emphasis from the spiritual and religious realm*

¹⁰³ Griffin states that, “following the War of Independence the construction of a unitary American national identity assumed an even greater urgency,” (1993:14).

¹⁰⁴ Griffin states that, “conversion narratives for young men were filled with the rhetoric of decision-making, whilst in those for young women stories of piety, submission and humility predominated,” (1993:14).

to the sexual and biological domain via this metaphor of religious conversion.
[1993:15 – my emphasis]

This allowed for the ‘biologicalization’ of adolescence, and Hall’s evolutionary paradigm and use of the ‘law of recapitulation’ further located the roots of this age-stage in genetics, biology and heredity.

Drawing from the work of Donna Haraway, Griffin notes that Hall’s paradigm had clear racial, class and gender implications and effects. As she explains,

the earlier version of recapitulation theory, or the ‘Great Chain of Being’, had provided a justification for slavery, imperialist exploitation and colonial expansion. It constructed a developmental progression from non-human animal species such as the chimpanzee or the gorilla, through the supposedly ‘primitive’ and ‘barbaric’ Africans, more ‘civilized’ Asians, to the white European ‘races’ who were set up as the pinnacle of civilized life. This also operated in class and gender terms, so that men were higher in the evolutionary scale than women, the aristocracy over the bourgeoisie, with the labouring poor and the destitute at the bottom of the heap.
[1993:16 – drawing from Haraway, 1989]

So why had other youth researchers crediting Hall with the ‘invention’ of adolescence not sought to explore the situated changes in race, class and gender relations occurring in the historical moment in which Hall emerges, or the race/class/gender implications of his construction of adolescence? Actually, we may see the obfuscation of these issues as a central organizing tenet in Hall’s conceptualization of adolescence as biological and universal. As Griffin contends, “the universalizing discourse of the storm and stress model submerged relations of sex/gender, ‘race’ and class behind the raging hormones theory of adolescence” (1993:22). Such submersion was a central step in the medicalization of adolescence where *biology and physiology trumps context and culture*. Yet this first movement from culture to biology, or nurture to nature, marks the beginning of a pervasive tension in research on adolescence, as the previous chapter illustrated.

Griffin also identifies this tension in her survey of youth research, noting that, “dominant ideologies about ‘youth’ and ‘adolescence’ have been characterized by a series of tensions and realignments between biological determinism and social constructionism” (1993:18).

Yet Griffin also identifies another central distinction in the body of work emerging after Hall, which she describes as the division between ‘mainstream’ and ‘radical’ approaches to youth studies. Griffin distinguishes between “mainstream” youth research - which she describes as those presenting “causal stories which are used to justify hegemonic discourses around ‘youth’ and ‘adolescence’,” (1993:3) - and “radical” youth research - which she describes as a perspective formed “through theoretical, political and methodological critiques of the mainstream” (ibid.). Griffin identifies these dual approaches – mainstream and radical – in both ‘nurture’ and ‘nature’ based perspectives on adolescence. For Griffin, mainstream research is “positivistic, empiricist and conservative” (ibid.) and is characterized “by the tendency to investigate young people as both the source and the victims of a series of ‘social problems’,” (ibid.). Radical research, on the other hand, tends to “adopt structuralist and post-structuralist analyses, and to *deconstruct* the association between young people and ‘social problems’, asking different questions and viewing research as part of a consciously political project” (ibid.). Griffin contends that, “contemporary youth research can be seen as a contested terrain in which mainstream and radical perspectives jostle for position in the construction of dominant and oppositional discourses around ‘youth’ and ‘adolescence’,” (1993:7). One example of this type of radical research which problematizes dominant constructions of youth and aims to centralize questions of power is provided in the work

of two Australian youth researchers, Johanna Wyn and Rob White, in their book *Rethinking Youth*.

Critical Youth Studies Section 3: Critiquing Discourses of Youth, Development &

Risk

Wyn & White take as their starting point the idea that ‘youth’ as a single homogenous and universal group does not exist. While youth may be grouped universally on the basis of age alone, central identity markers – such as race, class, gender, sexuality and culture – create important distinctions and divisions within this group. Similarly, the meaning of this ‘universal’ age-stage is highly culturally contingent.¹⁰⁵ For these authors it is through taking a ‘global perspective’ that, “the socially constructed nature of ‘youth’ becomes more apparent” (1997:10). As evidence, they draw from a research report produced by the United Nations about the global ‘situation of youth’, where they note that,

There are some 50 million children under the age of 15 who are at work. Nearly 98 percent of all these child labourers are found in developing countries...If ‘youth’ is understood as constituting the period between the end of childhood, on the one hand, and entry into the world of work on the other, then it is manifest that *youth does not exist in the situations outlined above*. [1997:10¹⁰⁶ – my emphasis]

It is this, “tension between the apparent universality of youth and the highly specific, differentiated and socially divided nature of youth,” (1997:2) which captivate the authors’

¹⁰⁵ As Wyn & White state, “although each person’s life space can be measured ‘objectively’ by the passing of time, cultural understandings about life stages give the process of growing up, and of ageing, its social meaning...Both youth and childhood have had and continue to have different meanings depending on young people’s social, cultural and political circumstances,” (1997:10).

¹⁰⁶ Citing the United Nations, 1986.

attention as it poses a challenge to biological and age-based conceptualizations of this age-stage.

Drawing on the suggestion of previous youth researchers¹⁰⁷, Wyn & White propose viewing youth as a ‘relational’ concept where, “the social processes whereby age is socially constructed, institutionalized and controlled in historically and culturally specific ways,” (1997:11) is given precedence over ‘categorical’ or universal age-based distinctions, epitomized by developmental frameworks, where the assumption of similarity based on age overrides differentiation along lines of gender, class, race and sexuality. At the same time, youth is relational because it, “exists and has meaning largely in relation to the concept of adulthood,” (ibid.). For the authors, taking a relational perspective on youth allows for the power relations of youth’s positionality to be highlighted – both in terms of how power is unevenly distributed among the race/class/gender/sexuality divisions *within* this age stage – and in regards to power relations *between* this age stage and that of adults¹⁰⁸. Utilizing the same approach as Griffin, where an attention to discourse and context problematizes dominant ideologies about adolescence, Wyn & White pose an intervention into dominant ‘developmental’ discourses.

¹⁰⁷ In particular they draw from Jones’s conceptualization of youth as an ‘age related process’ where, “the focus on youth is not on the inherent characteristics of young people themselves, but on the construction of youth through social processes (such as schooling, families or the labour market),” (Wyn & White, 1997:9).

¹⁰⁸ As the authors explain, “youth is seen as a separate ‘stage’ of life because the time of youth is about preparation for future (real) life – adulthood...[this] reinforces the idea that young people are marginal members of society, awaiting their full participation when they reach adulthood,” (1997:13) and simultaneously supports arguments for limiting the rights of youth.

For Wyn & White developmental frameworks serve to obscure power relations in important ways. First, as the authors state, “youth development is the conceptual edifice on which the practices which marginalize some young people are based,”(1997:51). That is to say, the use of categorical, universal age-based ‘norms’ delimit important differences among youth as aberrant or pathological problems with the *individual* rather than as differences between, for instance, cultural or class groups. These developmental ‘abberations’ then serve as a rationale for surveillance and intervention. As the authors note, “the concept of youth development provides a rationale for the notion of a mainstream...The young people who do not conform to the standards of this mainstream are identified as those *at risk*, requiring specific attention to bring them into line with the mainstream,” (1997:51 – my emphasis).

As previously discussed, developmental psychology is premised on the idea that there are certain fundamental developmental tasks the adolescent must complete in order to develop ‘normally’. Developmental discourse is concerned with the achievement of normality, and this goal is constructed through the scrutiny of those who are ‘abnormal’. This romance with the deviant extends far beyond developmental psychology, coming to constitute an hegemony in youth studies where, as Wyn & White note, “the study of adolescence is dominated by a focus on those who have failed to become normal, and hence are defined as a problem,” (1997:54).¹⁰⁹ That developmental discourses take an a-

¹⁰⁹ For important contributions to this idea see Ayman-Nolley & Tiara (2000), who surveyed 2,084 articles on adolescent development from the years 1985-1995 in order to interrogate the notion that there is a pervasive focus on failure and problems in adolescent research, (what they term an “obsession with the dark side of adolescence”). The authors did indeed find a persistent and statistically significant ‘adolescent turmoil bias’ in this research (they also found interesting correlations between this negative bias and the topics covered, as well as the ethnicity of the groups studied.)

historical perspective and assumes universality and linear development based on the ‘norms’ of a select group of youth, with limited applicability to other groups of youth, has already been discussed in this dissertation.¹¹⁰ What concerns the authors here, however, are the “implications of the false splitting of the *individual* and the *social* that is inherent in the notion of individual difference,” (1997:65) in developmental discourse.

For Wyn & White, this focus on individual difference obscures the centrality of power relations among groups of youth. As they explain, developmental psychology’s conceptualization of the ‘failures’ and ‘problems’ of youth as a failure of the *individual’s development*, “has been a central tool within education, welfare, social work and correctional institutions to support judgmental, discriminatory and invasive practices,” (1997:66). Importantly, in the current discourse of youth ‘at risk’, youth do not even have to ‘fail’ developmentally to be marked, regulated, or discriminated against. Rather, these authors note, “the concept of young people ‘at risk’ defines the nature of the social problem of failure in a particular way,” (1997:57). As youth researcher Christine Griffin explains, risk discourse,

avoids the awkward problem of having to identify certain young people as actual criminals or school refusers, enabling researchers to discuss ‘deviant youth’ in terms of the *likelihood* that they may become involved in a whole range of unacceptable activities or psychological orientations. The introduction of educational, clinical and/or corrective interventions can then be justified in the absence of any evidence of actual ‘deviance’ or ‘deficiency’ on the part of young people. [1993:201 – emphasis in original]

¹¹⁰ Wyn & White also address and review the critiques of Gilligan and others on the (mis)use of developmental ‘norms’ for girls and ethnic minority youth, stating that, “the youth developmental model imposes a highly ethnocentric and masculine model of human development which does ultimately reveal more about the practices of professionals and experts than it does about the young people whose lives it is intended to address,” (1997:63).

Through this focus on the individual, ‘problems’ which are tied to society and structure become reframed such that, “*structured inequality becomes identified as an individual problem,*” (Wyn & White, 1997:56 – my emphasis).¹¹¹

To illustrate this point the authors give an example from the 1993 report of the “At-Risk Youth Task Force of the State Employment and Training Commission of the State of New Jersey” (ibid.) which explored the future struggles of youth attempting to ‘make it in the Global Economy’. As the authors describe,

this report, like many of the others quoted in this collection, suggests a list of skills or ‘competencies’ which young people need to have in order to be successful. *In other words, the solution to the structural problem of the labor market is firmly located in individual performance and attainment. Young people are seen as ‘the problem’, the solution to which is to remedy the deficiencies in their attainment and performance.* [1997:56 – my emphasis]

As Griffin’s explication of Hall previously illustrated, this focus on the ‘problems’ and ‘pathologies’ of the individual obscures larger structural inequalities, and hides the fact that youth are members of society and members of different groups within society which are differently positioned in terms of power and privilege. Thus, a categorical approach which centralizes age over other constitutive identities, and the individual over social relations, is unable to address larger structural issues which centrally impact the lives of all members of society – including adolescents.

In addition to ignoring structural power differentials between groups of youth, developmental discourses also obscure power relations *between youth and adults*. The

¹¹¹ Here, problems are viewed as “located either in the *individual*, as a deficiency, or with *family relations*, which are seen in terms of social pathology,” (Wyn & White, 1997:54 – emphasis in original).

discourse of adolescent development reifies adolescence as *the* transitional phase of the life cycle and draws upon conceptualizations of adolescence which,

assumes a 'pre-social' self which exists within the individual but which must be found and developed ('finding one's self'). The individual is seen as distinct from and separate from society, as possessing a 'self' independent from social relationships or social circumstances. This aspect of the concept of adolescence is important to the idea that something very distinct is happening at this stage, because once the 'self' is found, then it is established for life. (1997:53)

While positing an essential, stable and stagnant 'adult' identity as the outcome of ('normal') adolescent development is itself problematic – as individuals continue to change and develop throughout the lifespan – it nevertheless serves to provide “legitimation for denying young people rights which are provided for adults,” (Wyn & White, 1997:71). For if youth are in the 'process of becoming' adults and full fledged members of society ('citizens'), then an argument can be made for the withholding of the rights and benefits associated with citizenship for this age group.

That such withholdings have become commonplace in Western societies is well understood, and in fact, the 'cultural weight' or importance of a given right or benefit is often expressed, at least in part, by age restrictions. Driving, purchasing legal drugs, entering the armed forces, gambling and voting are seen as special markers of adulthood, where it is assumed that one must have achieved a certain amount of developmental maturity in order to 'handle' these responsibilities.¹¹² What is important for our analysis

¹¹² Of course, the arbitrariness of these divisions are often commented upon. That 18 is the marker of 'adulthood' for some things such as entering the military and voting, but 21 is the marker of 'adulthood' for other 'privileges' such as purchasing alcohol, is evidence of the uncertainty around when one has achieved an 'adult' identity, as well as the ambiguity about which rights necessitate what level of maturity (i.e. the oft repeated statement that 'I can die for my country at 18, but I can't drink till I'm 21'). While such

is to follow Wyn & White's lead here in seeing how the ideological and discursive conceptualizations of adolescence in research are translated into mainstream discussions about youth in ways which may have on-the-ground consequences for adolescents as well as those – like parents or teachers – who frequently interact with them.

A prime example of this type of translation of research findings into mainstream discourse about teenagers is offered in a special edition of *U.S. News and World Report* entitled "Mysteries of the Teen Years" published May 10, 2005. One of the articles in this edition entitled "Inside the Teen Brain" utilizes recent neurological research results on brain maturation in adolescents to explain their behavior to parents. While acknowledging that earlier biological research into adolescence located the roots of 'storm and stress' in hormonal changes happening in this age stage, the author states that, "now, however, a growing number of scientists believe the true source of teenage behavior lies north of the gonads. It's that 3-pound blob of gray and white matter known as the brain. *Yes, teenagers do have brains*, but theirs don't yet function like adults," (2005:15 – my emphasis). Aside from the dismissive and condescending tone the author uses about teens in the italicized portion (which reveals that his intended audience is certainly not teenagers themselves) here the distinction between adult and teen brains is used to explain problematic teenage behavior.¹¹³ As the Critical Youth Studies scholars

sentiments have long fallen on deaf ears in terms of affecting policy change, they still raise important issues about cultural conceptions of age and maturity.

¹¹³ As an example, in discussing the case of a 'moody' teenager named Angelo, the author states, "Don't blame Angelo; blame the parts of his brain that process emotions and make decisions. His prefrontal cortex, where judgments are formed, is practically asleep at the wheel. At the same time, structures such as the amygdala, where raw emotions such as fear and anger are generated, are entering a stage of development in which they go into hyperdrive," (2005:16).

remind us, any knowledge *about* teens is often used in order to ‘better’ regulate and police them.

This attentiveness to the *effects* of research on youth is a crucial part of the Critical Youth Studies project as it allows us to see how research findings about youth get translated into public discourse and operationalized through policies and programming initiatives. The opposite is also true, as mainstream concerns and cultural ‘moral panics’ about youth create funding streams that support certain kinds of youth research about specific topics. These funding streams are both outgrowths and effects of youth research - as research gets translated into policy and programming initiatives - *and* acts as a catalyst for further youth research on certain topics - as policy and programming concerns incite further youth research to evaluate and strengthen current initiatives as well as offer possibilities for new intervention and prevention programs. As Critical Youth Studies scholar Peter Kelly notes, youth studies

is increasingly dependent on an ability to attract research funding from various public and private bodies whose prime concerns include the capacity to know youth in more sophisticated ways in order to deliver on the promise of *smoother* transitions, or *safer* drug and alcohol use and sexual activity, or more *appropriate* public behaviors. [2000:309 – emphasis in original]

Tracing the connections between youth research, funding streams and policy initiatives allows us to see how the knowledge produced when youth are ‘artifacts of expertise’ is an integral part of the transformation of youth into ‘artifacts of government’. In order to explicate this process, and its effects, we turn now to a brief discussion of Critical Youth Studies’ theorist Peter Kelly’s article, “Youth as an Artefact of Expertise: Problematizing the Practice of Youth Studies in an Age of Uncertainty,” (2000).

Critical Youth Studies Section 4: Youth, Expertise & Surveillance

In Kelly's article, which takes youth studies to task for its complicity in the governmentalization of youth, the author notes that one of the primary means through which youth are transformed into 'artifacts of government' is through the construction of 'populations of youth' by youth studies practitioners seeking, "to develop more sophisticated ways of identifying, differentiating and naming populations of young people with regard to various community and policy concerns," (2000:304). This process of identifying populations is a central organizing concept in Foucault's work on governmentality¹¹⁴ as governing is made possible, "reproduced, refined and *done better*...by coming to define, construct, (dis)assemble and *know better* the diverse persons, groups and populations," (2000:305 – emphasis in original) subject to its technologies. Indeed, part of the practice of youth studies is the compartmentalization of 'youth' into discrete (and manageable) populations which then become subject to, "processes of surveillance, identification, and intervention," (Kelly, 2000:304). As Kelly explains,

Thinking youth in terms of population enables an engagement with long-run historical processes of expert knowledge production about the truths of youth; an engagement which suggests that youth can be understood as an artefact of both these diverse forms of expertise, and of attempts by these expert systems to regulate the behaviours and dispositions of populations of youth, via mobilization of the truths of youth produced by these forms of expertise. (2000:306).

¹¹⁴ As Kelly says, "Foucault's conceptualization of 'governmentality' was structured by the concern to understand the emergence of a 'set of problems specific to the issue of population'," (2000:304 – quoting Foucault, 1991). For a discussion of the role and importance of population formation, see Urla, 1993.

These populations become normalized as truths, and in Kelly's attempt to "tell the truth about the processes of truth production about youth," (2000:308), he presents us with the example of the naturalized and normalized idea of the 'youth as student'.

Kelly problematizes this truth by drawing on the work of Australian historian Esther Faye who undertook a genealogical exploration of this construction of the adolescent as 'student', which Faye notes is linked to a particular moment in, "the context of post World War II reconstruction," (2000:310). According to Kelly, Faye's analysis argues that, "this truth [of youth-as-student] ought to be analyzed in such a way as to examine the rationalities and techniques mobilized in the diverse programs which took as their object this particular construction of the figure of the adolescent," (2000:310). For Faye this includes an engagement with educational psychology, particularly the historical moment (in 1947) where Australia's post-war reconstruction efforts included the establishment of the Psychology Branch with the Victorian Education Department. This center sought to bring the psychologist into the school in an effort to, "construct a narrative of progressive education in which schools could be conceived as 'happy, democratic communities...where the educational program was fitted to the pupil and not the pupil to the program,'" (Kelly, 2000:311 – citing Faye, 1991). Faye notes that this project (inevitably) failed, but she does not concern herself with how or why it failed. Instead she traces the discursive and ideological *effects* of the failure through the cultural discussions it provoked in which many different experts from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds debated the reasons for, and solutions to, these failures. As Faye notes,

the more that attention was drawn to the reasons why schools did not or could not achieve this objective – whether it was because of inadequate and inappropriate accommodation, inadequate numbers of teachers, or inappropriate curriculum and teaching methods – *the more the truth which*

linked the adolescent to the school in this particular way was consolidated. (Kelly, 2000:311¹¹⁵ – my emphasis)

For Kelly, the ideological and conceptual effects of this discourse is evident in how natural and normalized it is for us to view youth as students. Although this construction of ‘youth as student’ is a relatively recent phenomenon (with only 150 years of compulsory schooling), the construction is so common sense that, “it is almost an absurdity to think otherwise,” (2000:311).¹¹⁵ The same can be said for many other hegemonic views of youth. It is this attention to the processes and effects of truth production in youth studies which allows us to see that far from being trivial or part of a disconnected academic project, youth studies *and its practitioners* – both those working in academic contexts as well as those working in ‘applied’ or grounded youth advocacy and activism projects - are implicated in the ‘real life’ situation of youth.

As both Griffin and Wyn & White have elucidated, understanding not only the discourses and contexts but also the grounded *effects* of youth research is critical, for youth research does not take place in a cultural vacuum, but rather exists in a dynamic relationship with youth themselves, ‘youth service’ practitioners, parents, and policy makers. Through their careful and situated analysis of the context, discourse and effects of youth studies, the Critical Youth Studies scholars explore youth studies as a *process of truth production* about youth, which has real consequences and effects for this population. The importance of such a perspective on youth is discussed in the second part of this chapter, focusing on the work produced on youth in Anthropology and the promises offered for collaborative ethnographic methodologies.

¹¹⁵ Citing Faye, 1991.

So far, chapters two and three have been an attempt to map out the key analytical approaches to youth studies over the past century. In this review I've paid particular attention to the dominant paradigms in this field, exploring the shifts and debates which have altered the ways we have come to 'view youth' in this area of study. While there is certainly much work not reviewed in these chapters, the approaches and paradigms explored herein represent the prevailing perspectives on adolescence as they have shifted and evolved since this topic first entered academic and cultural discussions. I have ended the review with the Critical Youth Studies approach as I contend that this mode of analysis represents the most promising venue for critical interrogations of adolescence capable of contextualizing and deconstructing dominant understandings of youth while remaining sensitive to the ways in which these expert discourses continue to impact cultural perceptions as well as the 'real lives' of teenagers today. The Critical Youth Studies approach is crucial for understanding the current moment when teenagers are routinely presented as mysterious and foreign creatures which can only be 'known' through the careful study and analysis of experts.

Anthropology Section 1: So Who Are These Youth "Experts" Anyway?

Popular media give us a sense of the growing importance of expertise on adolescence. Examples of this can be had in two cover stories on teenagers in *Time Magazine*; "Special Report: Being 13" (August 8, 2005), and "Secrets of the Teen Brain" (May 10, 2004), as well as an entire edition of *U.S. News & World Report* devoted to the "Mysteries of the Teen Years" (May 10, 2005). The discourses invoked in these articles (both the *Time* cover stories refer to the adolescent as "mystifying") and their pictorial

representations of youth,¹¹⁶ construct teenagers as the ultimate ‘other’, a biological and cultural ‘foreigner’ existing within our very own homes who require translation by experts.¹¹⁷

It is now commonplace for parents to consult psychologists, educators, doctors and other experts on adolescence for help managing their teenager. Indeed, the editions of *Time* and *U.S. News & World Report* referenced in this section all assume a readership of parents and are geared towards ‘helping’ parents by reviewing expert advice, presenting ‘for further reference’ reading lists and even constructing ‘to do lists’ which state, “do these things and you and your child will survive adolescence,” (*U.S. News & World Report* 2005:85). These articles normalize the turn to expert outsiders for parents, and construct ‘teenagerhood’ as something a *parent* must endure and survive.¹¹⁸ At a time when even their own parents are assumed to be ill equipped to understand or ‘manage’ teenagers, contextualizing and problematizing expert discourses about youth

¹¹⁶ The cover shots of both the *U.S. News & World Report* and the May 10, 2004 *Time Magazine* edition show Caucasian female adolescents whose faces are partially hidden, possibly invoking the imagery of the ‘veil’, and illustrating the idea that this person’s identity is obscured and unknown – a clear representation of the idea of the adolescent as mysterious and unknowable.

¹¹⁷ Illustrations of this idea are prevalent, take for example the following quote from an article entitled “Inside the Teen Brain” in the *U.S. News and World Report* special edition on teenagers, “One day, your child is a beautiful, charming 12-year-old, a kid who pops out of bed full of good cheer, clears the table without being asked, and brings home good grades from school. The next day, your child bursts into tears when you ask for the salt and listens to electronic music at maximum volume for hours on end... Your bluebird of happiness is flown, replaced by a groaning lump that can scarcely be roused for school. *In short, your home is now inhabited by a teenager,*” (2005:15 – my emphasis).

¹¹⁸ This is evidenced in the titles of books and websites devoted to parenting teens. For instance, one article in the *U.S. News & World Report* special edition stated that parents often, “turn to advice books like *Now I Know Why Tigers Eat Their Young: Surviving a New Generation of Teenagers*. Other parents seek solace in online chat rooms that seem to start every month: *DifficultChild.com*, *DefiantTeen.com*, *HelpYourTeens.com*,” (2005:27).

take on a heightened importance. And at a time when expert notions of youth are used to limit youth's mobility (like policies banning adolescents from shopping malls on weekend evenings),¹¹⁹ restrict youth's rights (like the recent push to legislate the use of cell-phones by teenagers while driving),¹²⁰ use youth's assumed 'recklessness' to limit the rights of adult women's access to birth-control measures (like the recent denial 'Plan B' for over-the-counter sale),¹²¹ and increase surveillance of youth (such as the Pentagon's database of high school students),¹²² exploring the connections between expertise and strategies and technologies of governance is a critical project.

¹¹⁹ Such policies, know as "MB18" – or Must Be 18 – are part of a nationwide trend, and have most recently been enacted locally in Western Massachusetts at Holyoke's Ingleside Mall. For a critical perspective on such policies see Kuban, 2005.

¹²⁰ In September, 2005 the National Transportation Safety Board, "urged States to prohibit inexperienced teenaged drivers from using wireless communications devices" (NTSB Press Release) voting to include this ban on it's annual "Most Wanted Safety Recommendations to States". According to the NTSB teenagers make up 6.4% of the driving population yet they account for 14.3 percent of accidents. Interestingly, this is similar to the statistics given by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration about accident rates for senior citizens, who would not fall under the proposed rules limiting wireless communication for teenagers and novice drivers, but who nevertheless were responsible for 14% of traffic fatalities and 17% of pedestrian fatalities according to the NHTSA's 1997 report on older drivers.

¹²¹ In August, 2005 the Federal Drug Administration announced the postponement of over-the-counter sales for "Plan B", a form of emergency contraception. A central part of the justification for this postponement centered on the premise that while the drug was boxed to be sold for those women '17 and older' no one could guarantee that this drug wouldn't fall into the hands of females 16 and younger (in May 2004, the FDA had issued a "Not Approvable" letter when the drug manufacturers sought to distribute the drug OTC without age restrictions, the '17 plus' packaging was an attempt by the manufacturer to address this issue). The recent debate provoked by this issue led one journalist to declare that, "contraception is...becoming a teenage combat zone," (Goodman, 2005) where teenagers are on the frontline of reproductive struggles which could ultimately affect women of all ages, and where legislators and federal administrations use "the teenage cover story to keep emergency contraception out of easy reach of women of any age," (ibid.).

¹²² As ABC News and other reporting agencies have explored, in June of 2005 the Pentagon joined forces with BeNow, Inc. – a private marketing firm – to create a database of high school students nationwide for recruitment purposes. While some

Yet time and again, and despite the plethora of youth research undertaken in other disciplines, the ‘experts’ we turn to in understanding this population continue to overwhelmingly be located in the psychological and medical fields. Indeed despite a near century of intervention from those concerned with exploring the ‘nurture’ side of adolescence, we continue to root this age-stage in ‘nature’, viewing adolescence as a psychological and biological ‘phase’. As we have seen in the review of youth studies undertaken in the previous chapter, psychologists have long been regarded as the ‘experts of adolescence’. As more and more research on adolescence is undertaken in the biological sciences we have witnessed a recent shift in cultural discussions in the West from the ‘hormonal surges’ of adolescence to a new focus on the adolescent brain, with neurologists now entering the arena as the new experts of youth, vying alongside psychologists for explanatory ownership of this age-stage. Occasionally, sociologists are sought for their explanations of a host of adolescent ‘problem behaviors’ and their impact on society, yet rarely, if ever, are anthropologists consulted in such discussions. The absence of anthropologists’ voices which could provide a cross-cultural perspective on this ‘universal’ and ‘biological’ phase, is a striking omission. While it was anthropologist Margaret Mead who staged the first intervention into biological and universal notions of adolescence in 1929, the contributions of this discipline in studies on adolescence continue to be negated and marginalized. Yet anthropology’s ethnographic

activists and advocates have argued against this new recruitment strategy, the gathering of such information, and the responsibility of schools to provide such information is actually a provision in the “No Child Left Behind” education law. A portion of NCLB, SEC. 9528, ‘Armed Forces Recruiter Access To Students And Student Recruiting Information’ reads, “each local educational agency receiving assistance under this Act shall provide, on a request made by military recruiters or an institution of higher education, access to secondary school students names, addresses, and telephone listings”.

methodology and relativist orientation continues to offer the most promising venue for critiques of adolescence as a universal and biological phenomenon, and its ethnographic methodology presents possibilities for understanding and problematizing this age stage from the ‘inside out’, by bringing the voices and experiences of adolescents to bear on our theoretical frameworks of this age-stage.

Anthropology Section 2: Anthropologists Tackle Youth and Adolescence

The importance of anthropology’s work on youth and adolescence was reviewed by linguistic anthropologist Mary Bucholtz in her 2002 article in the *Annual Reviews in Anthropology* entitled “Youth and Cultural Practice”. In this piece Bucholtz presents a timeline of anthropology’s work on adolescence from its earliest ‘foundational ethnographies’ to its more recent work on a host of issues regarding youths’ cultural practices. In an unsurprising point of entry for a linguistic anthropologist, Bucholtz begins with a focus on terminology – exploring ‘youth’ as a “flexible and contestable *social* category” (2002:528 – my emphasis) in contrast to ‘adolescence’ as a cultural and biological universal. From here she traces out the different trajectories of two projects, the ‘anthropology of adolescence’ versus the ‘anthropology of youth’.

Bucholtz characterizes the ‘anthropology of adolescence’ as a “search for cross-cultural generalizations and variations in the biological, psychological, and social characteristics of this universal category,” (2002:528) a comparative approach in line with Mead’s legacy which Bucholtz posits as the dominant paradigm in explorations of this topic until the second half of the twentieth century. Characterizing adolescence as a liminal period, this approach focused on the ‘rites of passage’ associated with this age-

stage and utilized primarily quantitative and comparative research methodologies¹²³.

When questions of modernity and globalization began to take center stage in the discipline, the anthropology of adolescence became concerned with exploring the, “consequences of large-scale social and cultural transformations,” (2002:529) on youth. Much of this research focused on “the role of cultural contact and conflict in adolescence suicide,” (2002:530) and in many ways continued the historical focus on adolescent ‘storm and stress’. Yet Bucholtz notes a critical shift here as researchers, “locat[ed] the cause of psychological or physical disturbance in specific *social and economic processes*,” (ibid.- my emphasis) and sought to bring in a focus on youth agency whereby, “youths’ socially transgressive actions may be understood not simply as culture-specific manifestations of psychological distress but more importantly as *critical cultural practices through which young people display agency*,” (2002:531 – my emphasis). Perhaps an attempt to reconcile the tensions between ‘nature’ and ‘nurture’ perspectives on adolescence, Bucholtz notes that,

the anthropology of adolescence thus considers development and change at two levels: individual and cultural. These levels interact analytically in the social staging of adolescence in particular cultural contexts in which *the universal developmental arc of adolescence is shaped by historically specific processes of social, political, and economic transformation, as well as by existing cultural practices*. [2002:531 – my emphasis]

Such processes and practices are given closer attention in what Bucholtz characterizes as the ‘anthropology of youth’, where, “youth foregrounds age not as trajectory, but as identity,” (2002:532) and which emphasizes, “the here-and-now of young people’s

¹²³ The work produced within the anthropology of adolescence include sweeping statistical explorations of this age-stage across cultures (for instance, Schlegel & Barry’s analysis of adolescence in 200 societies, and the Harvard Adolescence Project’s in-depth multidisciplinary approach to adolescence in seven societies) (Bucholtz, 2002).

experience,” (ibid.). The differences between these two anthropological approaches to this life stage are illustrated by Bucholtz in her analysis of the literature produced in each of these ‘projects’ on two ‘hot topics’ in the study of youth – violence and sexuality.

Bucholtz characterizes the ‘anthropology of adolescence’ approach to violence as one which, “asserts that exposure to violence leads to youths’ loss of innocence” (2002:533) where youth may go on to perpetuate violence in their future lives. In contrast, the anthropology of youth approach, “centers on cultural agency and understands youth as able to adapt effectively to violent situations in culturally specific ways,” (ibid.). A similar distinction between approaches is evident in research on youth and sexuality where an ‘anthropology of adolescence’ perspective (a la Mead), “focuses on culturally specific sexual practices and the extent to which...[it] is culturally discouraged, tolerated, or encouraged,” (2002:534). In contrast, an ‘anthropology of youth’ approach to sexuality, “examines how young people themselves view sexual activity,” (ibid.).

Indeed, it is this focus on agency and identity, and the attention to the insiders ‘emic’ perspective, which characterizes the anthropology of youth and sets it apart from the previous and more prevalent ‘anthropology of adolescence’. Bucholtz notes that issues of agency and identity have been previously raised in youth research, in sociological accounts and in particular through the work of the Birmingham School on ‘youth subcultures’, yet she notes that the Birmingham School approach is riddled with theoretical problems (such as the overdetermination of class, the marginalization of gender and other constitutive identities of youth, the focus on ‘spectacular’ subcultural styles, etc.) which were brought to light via the critiques of the Birmingham School

approach in the 1980s. According to Bucholtz, this approach to youth cultures and youth subcultures,

as productive as it has been and continues to be, is too limiting for research on youth from an anthropological perspective. Also necessary is an anthropologically based retheorizing of youth culture, in which static and inflexible cultural boundaries are replaced with the much more fluid and indeterminate collections of practices and ideologies that constitute culture in anthropology. [2002:539]

Bucholtz thus calls for a shift from youth culture to a more ‘dynamic form’ of analysis concerned with “the cultural practices of youth” (ibid.), an approach which allows for more nuanced understanding of what constitutes agentic youth practices, is capable of attending to ‘everyday’ youth behaviors, and allows us to rethink resistance away from conscientiously dichotomous forms into more subtly oppositional and flexible practices. For Bucholtz, such an approach would privilege qualitative and ethnographic methodologies over quantitative and comparative approaches, and would situate itself in *local* and *context specific* understandings of ‘youth’ as an identity rather than as a moment on a universal developmental trajectory.

The ‘anthropology of youth’ which Bucholtz calls for has indeed begun with a number of recent excellent ethnographies, especially Julie Bettie’s *Women Without Class: Girls, Race and Identity* (2003), Elizabeth Chin’s *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture* (2001) and Sunaina Maira’s *Desis In the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City* (2002), taking up the issues laid out by Bucholtz in their careful and nuanced understandings of adolescent identities. While an in depth discussion of these ethnographies is beyond the scope of this chapter, my focus on *approaches* to youth studies necessitates an awareness of this new work, and understanding the importance of these new ethnographies’ attention to youth agency and

youth identity for the field of youth studies. While the topic-specific focus of each ethnography varies, the focus on youth as agentic actors who attempt to ‘make sense’ and ‘make change’ in their lives through their identities against a backdrop of structural inequalities based on gender, race, class and ethnicity, is common in all of these works. In particular, the qualitative and ethnographic methodologies of these researchers with their emphasis on participant-observation, or “kicking it” (Bettie, 2003:17), with youth while attempting to draw out situated youth experiences in response and in regards to questions of identity means complicating notions of objectivity and neutrality, crafting reflexive research practices, and attending to power differentials between researcher and researched in a manner similar to the Critical Youth Studies approach. In both the CYS and ‘anthropology of youth’ projects there is an awareness that we are working simultaneously with individual human agents and more abstract subject positions, and that the findings involved in research projects have implications for both.

While the ethnographies produced in this new ‘anthropology of youth’ have not yet made it to *Time Magazine* or *U.S. News and World Report*, more and more they represent a new movement in youth studies, one in which the approach of Critical Youth Studies and its attentiveness to youth as an artifact of expertise and an artifact of government, is being combined with local ethnographic explorations of youth and their attempts to negotiate identities which help them navigate their way through the world. In contrast to the detached ‘view from above’ and the psychologically based ‘view from within’ which has characterized explorations of adolescence over the past century, the new ‘anthropology of youth’ produces localized and contextualized *ethnographies* of youth which are capable of understanding youth both as an individually held identity and

a culturally constituted subject position regulated and surveilled through a number of governing strategies. As such, the ethnographies produced within the ‘anthropology of youth’ render, “visible and significant the everyday reality of the lives we study in ways that contribute to broader arenas of cultural production and analysis,” (Ginsberg, 2004:xii). An exploration of this methodology is now in order.

Anthropology Section 3: What Is Ethnography?

Intellectually, ethnography has long ceased to be conceived of as ‘mere description’, raw material for a natural science of human behavior. Whether via the literary turn (from ‘thick description’ to ‘writing culture’) or the historic one (political economy and the turn to regional social history), mainstream social/cultural anthropology as practiced in leading departments in the United States and the United Kingdom has come to view ethnographic explication as a worthy and sufficient intellectual project in its own right. (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:1)

For over a century, anthropologists have been practicing ‘ethnographic’ research, and for nearly as long they have engaged in debates *about* ethnography, arguing over and through what Stocking has referred to as anthropology’s fundamental methodological value and the ‘the taken-for-granted, pretheoretical notion of what it is to do anthropology (and be an anthropologist),’ (1992:282). Indeed, even a synthetic literature search will yield a plethora of discussions about this method, how it differs from other qualitative approaches, how it is conducted in various social sciences, or treatises on the many aspects of ethnography that capture the attention of scholars.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ As Gupta & Ferguson note, “[t]he concept of culture has been vigorously critiqued and dissected in recent years (e.g., Wagner 1981; Clifford 1988; Rosaldo 1989a; Fox, ed., 1991); ethnography as a genre of writing has been made visible and critically analyzed (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1988); the dialogic encounters that constitute fieldwork experiences have been explored (Crapanzano 1980; Rabinow 1977; Dumont 1978; Tedlock 1983); even the peculiar textual genre of fieldnotes has been subjected to reflection and analysis (Sanjek 1990),” (1987:2).

Broadly speaking, when defining or discussing ‘ethnography’ one may be referring to either the *practice* of studying a culture or cultural group (i.e. the process of ethnographic fieldwork), or the *product* produced by such a study (i.e. the written ethnography) (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999:4). This collapse between process and product has produced a pervasive tension between scholars interested in exploring the politics, methods and ethics in either the ethnographic text or in the ethnographic encounter itself. This tension was brought to the forefront during the ‘writing culture debates’, the responses to the 1987 publication of *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, Eds.), largely cited as the text which produced a profound paradigmatic shift in the discipline, often referred to as the ‘crisis of representation’¹²⁵.

In great measure, the provocation for this text was provided by scholars outside the discipline of anthropology, especially postcolonial and feminist theorists who, “drew attention to anthropology’s historical complicity with colonialism and showed how anthropological representations of non-western people had contributed to cultural exoticism,” (Hemment, 8)¹²⁶. In response, *Writing Culture* grappled with the issues of

¹²⁵Using the *Writing Culture* debates as the foundational source for these issues is, in part, a problematic fiction. Indeed, critiques of anthropology’s complicity in colonialism and reflexive attention to what the discipline has historically silenced is evident in work produced over a decade prior (see for instance Asad, 1973 and Hymes, 1972). As will become clear, I utilize the *Writing Culture* debates as my starting point not because it posed questions fundamentally new to the discipline, but rather because it sparked a debate regarding the prioritization of text and representation over the processes of fieldwork. Further I note that this attention to text was explored elsewhere prior to the publication of *Writing Culture*, indeed both Clifford and Marcus had published earlier articles on this topic (see Marcus & Cushman, 1982; Clifford, 1983). Yet I contend that the *Writing Culture* debates has served as a generally accepted ‘origin story’ and a catchall phrase to denote the concerns of representation in ethnographic writing, and later, in the politics of the ethnographic process.

¹²⁶ See Harrison, 1991 for a discussion of how this intellectual lineage is largely unacknowledged.

power inherent in the ethnographic encounter at the moment of representation, and the danger of textually reproducing a marginalized and silenced ‘Other’ in the ‘writing up’ process. Part of turning a critical lens on the ethnographic product meant turning our attention to the producer of the ethnography – the anthropologist him or herself. This sparked questions of authority (who am I to write of the other?), responsibility (how am I held accountable to those I write about?) and positionality (how do my identities construct, limit, or enable the ‘data’ I both receive and interpret in writing?). In large measure, these issues were dealt with under the umbrella heading ‘reflexivity’ which came to denote a mode of analysis and writing which centralized the ethnographer wrestling with these questions.

Shortly after the publication of *Writing Culture*, feminist ethnographer Pat Caplan discussed the ‘crisis of representation’ and the ensuing reflexive turn but warned that we should not, “over-estimate its innovativeness: we can find long-standing debates in anthropology which presage these developments,” (1988:9) and she cites such examples by early female ethnographers.¹²⁷ Over the next few years a number of scholars took Clifford to task for his lack of attention to feminist ethnographies.¹²⁸ For Clifford,

¹²⁷ Caplan points to the work of Bohannon and Powdermaker who had both taken experimental approaches in their writing, yet she notes that, “[w]hen women were using the experiential approach to ethnographic writing, much of it was dismissed as ‘self-indulgence’ (cf. Dumont 1978:9): now that it is being done by men, it is termed ‘experimental’, perhaps an example of what Judith Oakly has termed the ‘curious shift of meaning’ which tends to attach to correlations when gender is added,” (1988:16, citing Oakly, 1975). Wolf expounds on this idea noting that, “[o]ne can find feminist social scientists who are indignant and at the same time wryly amused to hear the critiques they have leveled for years now being translated into postmodern terminology and taken *very* seriously,” (1992:6 – emphasis in original).

¹²⁸ The response from feminists was enough to prompt Wolf’s comment that, “if there is any page James Clifford has written that he may wish he hadn’t, I suspect it is (that) section in his introduction,” (1992:7).

however, this exemption was justified by his notion that, “feminism has not contributed much to the theoretical analysis of *ethnographies as texts*,” (1986:20 – my emphasis).¹²⁹

It is this emphasis on texts which provided a key point of contention, especially by feminists, in the decade following the publication of *Writing Culture*. What the ensuing debate brought to the forefront was the split between the process and product of ethnography and the different ways power differentials between researcher and researched needed to be negotiated both in the written ethnography as well as the ethnographic encounter.

The critiques offered by the feminist researchers brought to light the irony that the debates over, “the search for more adequate means of representing or evoking ethnographic subjects and our fieldwork experiences has led us further away from the implications of our human relations while in the field,” (Enslin, 1994:541). For these researchers, the experimental moment was one in which, “politics, social inequality, and injustice...have become so institutionalized as textual issues,” (Enslin, 1994:540). In contrast to *Writing Culture*’s attention to the politics in poetics (or the textual product), some feminist scholars attempted to shift the focus onto the politics of the ethnographic process. Many of the feminist responses to the *Writing Culture* debates were concerned with three interrelated topics; problematizing issues of the researchers’ subjectivity,

¹²⁹ In the introduction to *Writing Culture*, Clifford ‘explains away’ the contributions of feminist anthropology which he stated had, “not produced either unconventional forms of writing or a developed reflection on ethnographic textuality as such,” (1986:21). Even though he admits that, “a few quite recent works had reflected in their form feminist claims about subjectivity, relationality, and female experience...these same textual forms were shared by other, nonfeminist, experimental works,” (ibid.). Yet he seems to launch a critique on the feminist project when he says, “our focus was thus on textual theory as well as on textual form: *a defensible, productive focus*,” (ibid. – my emphasis). One might imagine that he is stating indirectly that feminist work is *indefensible*, *unproductive*, and probably even, as Wolf noted, *self-indulgent*.

exploring the (unequal) power relations between researchers and their informants, and offering strategies for attending to these issues *in the field* through researcher/researched collaborations.

The legacy constructed by these feminist anthropologists' responses to the *Writing Culture* debates have informed many of the broader anthropological projects concerned with social justice- be it activist or engaged or critical anthropology – as well as methodologies utilized by researchers in these camps to address power differentials and empowerment in the field – for instance in participatory action research and collaborative research methodologies. They have also overwhelmingly informed the small, yet growing, body of literature dealing with the ethics, methods and politics of youth research. As Cieslik notes, “although young people have been at the centre of much research, policy-making and practice as well as being a popular area of undergraduate study, there have been very few texts exploring the methodological issues facing youth researchers,” (2003:1).

Indeed, despite the prevalence of youth research in the social sciences, the methods and ethics of such research have only recently become a topic of academic scrutiny. Most notably the edited volume *Researching Youth* (2003) provides the first well-rounded and explicit discussion of the politics, ethics and methods of youth research. Focusing especially on qualitative and ethnographic research, the articles in this volume pick up on many of the discussions in anthropology regarding the ethnographic process and product since the *Writing Culture* debates. In particular, the politics of the researcher/researched relationship (including, but not limited to, the negotiations of the ethics of youth research, and exploration of collaborative and

participatory research methodologies with youth) dominate these discussions of youth research methodologies. As this issue has long been a concern of feminist scholars, I frame this new area of inquiry as an outgrowth of the feminist intellectual lineage.¹³⁰ One of the primary areas this literature has contributed to is the debates surrounding researcher subjectivity and the importance of a reflexive approach to our positionality – both while in the field as well as during the writing stage.

Anthropology Section 4: Power and Researcher Subjectivity

We are human beings studying other human beings, and we cannot leave ourselves out of the question. (Slocum, 1975:37)

Much early feminist anthropological scholarship was concerned with addressing the andocentric bias in anthropology and highlighting the identities of the researcher as a lens through which data is filtered (see especially Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974 and Reiter, 1975).¹³¹ As di Leonardo notes, feminist research in this arena highlighted the, “need to attend to and to investigate actively the multiple layers of context – or, in another formulation, social location – through which we perceive particular cultural realities,” (1991:31). In attending to questions of subjectivity and the “power-laden encounter between researcher and researched,” (ibid.) some feminists picked up on scholarship which explored the possibilities of women interviewing women as providing a shared meeting ground, as a feminist researcher studying women was “by definition both

¹³⁰ This is not my characterization alone – indeed much of this scholarship explicitly draws from feminist research on ethnography (see Hollands, 2003; Emond, 2003; Hood-Williams & Cohen, 2003).

¹³¹ Indeed, according to di Leonardo, “[t]hese two volumes functioned as the ‘bibles’ of feminist anthropology for the ensuing decade,” (1991:7).

‘inside’ the culture and participating in that which she is observing,” (Oakley, 1981).¹³²

Such discussions privileged identity, and posited that shared gender identities might facilitate better data, but later scholarship would question this idea as a form of ‘cultural feminist essentialism’ (di Leonardo, 1991), and would critique the “proposition that women are, across time and space, a single oppressed and virtuous class¹³³,” (di Leonardo, 1991:26). A resultant shift towards social constructionism or anti-essentialism would highlight how gender, like race and ethnicity, “are not immutable characteristics of individuals but emergent and shifting social categories,” (di Leonardo, 1991:29). In this new conceptualization, we could no longer view ‘women interviewing women’ (Oakley, 1981) as un-problematically or inevitably providing an identity-based common ground¹³⁴. This was the case not only in regards to the disparities between researcher/researched identities, but also in terms of the research population itself, which could no longer be conceptualized as a bounded and homogenous grouping¹³⁵.

¹³² Notably, di Leonardo states that the claim of, “the existence of specifically feminist methodologies in social research usually refer to this face-to-face level” (1991:31).

¹³³ Indeed, as Enslin notes, “while a partial identification with women’s experiences can provide common ground for conversation and debate, it should not gloss crucial differences among women, especially differences of economic and political power,” (1994:550).

¹³⁴ Rather, “academic feminists...almost at once were forced to grapple with the question of ‘difference’ – the multiple racial, ethnic, class, sexual, age, regional, and national identities of women – as they noted their own restricted demographic representation and research interests,” (di Leonardo, 1991:18). These issues of difference and strategic identification between researcher and researched would later be dealt with in the so-called ‘native’ anthropology debates (see especially Narayan, 1993).

¹³⁵ Indeed, as di Leonardo notes, “the hoary anthropological shorthand, “the *X* say” must be replaced with genuine attention to what varying populations among the *X* say,” (1991:31). Needless to say, this shift towards viewing the research group as more nuanced, differentiated and anti-homogenous was inextricably linked to the critiques offered in post-colonial feminist scholarship (see for instance, Mohanty, Russo & Torres, 1991). For discussion of race, gender and class in the research relationship see Higginbotham & Leung, 1987.

While feminists in anthropology have long grappled with these issues of positionality and subjectivity, discussions of methodologies in youth studies has been slow to catch up. For a long time methodological discussions in this arena continued to privilege the same identity-based groupings that feminists had long ago deconstructed. In particular, youth studies researchers drew on early (outdated?) feminist arguments for the, “matching of interviewers with respondents”¹³⁶ (Hodkinson 2005:138). Such ideas problematically privileged shared socio-political identity grouping as the basis of relationship formation¹³⁷, and in regards to youth, highlighted the importance of being young or at least not “too noticeably adult” (LeCompte, Schensul, Weeks & Singer 1999:33) with the ability to adopt youth ‘style’ as a starting point for establishing rapport¹³⁸. Of course, neither actually sharing the participant’s stylistic preferences, nor the researchers’ strategic adoption of a “carefully cultivated subcultural appearance,” (Hodkinson, 2005:138) guarantees acceptance by the group under study. Yet it is often at this level that previous discussions on establishing relationships in youth research have taken place. While this emphasis on style may be a holdover from the so-called “storm

¹³⁶ In regards to ‘matching’, Hodkinson pointed to work by, “feminists [which] have established that differences in status and power between researchers and respondents can seriously inhibit rapport,” (2005:138-9).

¹³⁷ Because absolute ‘matching’ between researcher and researched along identity lines are (nearly) impossible, such a perspective runs the risk of creating a hierarchy of identities where certain, especially visible identities (i.e. gender, age and race) are deemed more important to match than those identities which may be ‘hidden’ (i.e. sexuality and class).

¹³⁸ As LeCompte, Schensul, Weeks & Singer state, “Donna Deyhle (1986) was able to win the confidence of the Native American students she wished to study because, as a young woman who herself possessed a pair of the parachutes pants that all the young people coveted, she could talk with them about common interests in clothing,” (1999:33).

and dress” (Hood-Williams and Cohen, 2003:35) research of the Birmingham School¹³⁹, these superficial discussions of what it takes to establish working relationships with youth are no longer up to the methodological task.

Recently, the issues raised in feminist explorations of researcher subjectivity and feminist and postcolonial scholarship on the ‘native’ researcher have been recast in youth studies as questions of ‘insider research’ (Hodkinson, 2005; Bennet, 2003). This discursive shift has taken place for a number of reasons. First and foremost, after decades of feminist scholarship on partial identification and situated knowledges (see Haraway, 1988), discussions of the ‘native’ have been supplanted in many arenas by terms more likely to index the multiplicity of identity and subjectivity in the field (see for example, Abu-Lughod’s (1991) discussion of the ‘halfie’ researcher). Secondly, the shift from ‘native’ to ‘insider’ in youth research belies the ways in which researchers are attending to the complexities of youth – in other words, while ‘youth’ might be defined categorically based on age, the push towards understanding youth as a non homogenous category has meant attending to their other constitutive identities (i.e. race, gender, sexuality, class) and thus ‘insider’ is used to index ways in which researchers might share some identities with youth.

As scholars have noted, researchers with previous experience and familiarity with their research subjects dates back to the research undertaken at the Chicago School (Bennett, 2003; Hodkinson, 2005). These pre-existent relationships are common in youth studies and explorations of youth cultures, especially for those undertaking such

¹³⁹ In characterizing the Birmingham school research as such, Hood-Williams and Cohen are referring specifically to the CCCS researchers who attended to the ‘stylistic’ aspects of youth cultures (see especially Hebdige, 1979).

research at the doctoral level (Hodkinson, 2005; Bennett, 2003; Stuart, 2001). Indeed Bennett notes, “contemporary research on youth culture is...*distinctively characterized by a level of commonality between the researcher and the researched*,” (2003:196 – my emphasis). Hodkinson thus uses the term ‘insider research’ “as a means to designate ethnographic situations characterized by significant levels of initial proximity between researcher and researched,” (2005:132¹⁴⁰). This is the case with my own research as well, as I had known many of the youth who would become my research ‘participants’ for several years when I began my project. Perhaps more crucially, I also knew well the youth that would later become my ‘co-researcher’ – as I sought to use collaboration as a method to disrupt traditional researcher/researched power differentials.

Indeed, regardless of whether we (or the extent to which we) share previous relationships with our ‘informants’, negotiation of the power differentials in the researcher/researched relationship demand our attention. In youth studies in particular we must pay attention to the probability that these power differentials may be potentially heightened when age differences are taken into account, as youth are structurally disempowered in relation to adults, and are used to striking power disparities in schools and programs where adults have clear power *over youth*. Thus adult researchers must be careful to not simply reproduce the dominant youth/adult power relationship and instead seek to make the research process and product as transparent to the youth as possible. In an effort to destabilize traditional power relationships and treat youth as active and

¹⁴⁰ This definition draws from feminist work critiquing the essentialism of identity and moves us away from discussions presenting “social groups as fixed, one-dimensional and mutually exclusive,” (Hodkinson, 2005:141) and as possessing a ‘singular truth’ which the ethnographer may unearth (Hodkinson, 2005) towards an approach more up to the task of addressing how, “particular elements of identity fluctuates back and forth according to context and audience,” (Hodkinson, 2005:133).

agentive participants, many researchers have argued for a more collaborative and participatory methodological approach to youth studies.

Anthropology Section 5: Collaboration as Disruption - Participatory Youth

Research

We cannot rely on the traditional approach of social science which observes (young people's) lives and reports it to policy makers in the hope that they will improve (their) conditions. We now need a more radical social science research with (young people) in which (they) themselves learn to reflect on their own conditions, so that they can gradually begin to take greater responsibility in creating communities different from the ones they have inherited. [Hart (1995) quoted in Percy-Smith and Weil, 2003:83]

The critiques and discussions offered by youth studies practitioners have resulted in an overwhelming call for more collaborative and participatory methodologies when studying youth and youth cultures.¹⁴¹ As Jones, Starkey & Orme note, “there is a growing emphasis within the research and youth work communities both on encouraging young people to participate more fully as subjects of research and on exploring ways of actively involving young people in designing and conducting their own research,” (2003:64). Such research is designed primarily in regards to the disjuncture of much previous youth research which operated at a theoretical level possibly at odds with participant's articulations of their own lives. While not abandoning theory, youth researchers working with collaborative ethnographic methodologies now struggle with how to, “provide an authentic voice for young people which can be empowering whilst at the same time

¹⁴¹ It is worthwhile to note that issues of collaboration and participation in representations of marginalized research groups have been made in many other fields as well, for instance in collaborative and indigenous media (see especially Elder, 1995 and Ginsberg, 1995) and in indigenous archaeology (see especially Watkins, 2000).

providing an analysis which extends beyond the mere descriptions of the meanings which respondents attach to their actions,” (Cieslik, 2003:8).

Many of the youth researchers attempting to combine youth’s voices with critical analysis have turned to Participatory Action Research¹⁴² (PAR) in their, “quest for a good-enough methodology,” (Hemment, YEAR:10). Given that traditional PAR models, and ‘action’ anthropology programs, have been critiqued as often actually *reinscribing* power differentials along axes of gender, race and class¹⁴³, the youth researchers exploring these methodologies have drawn from feminist collaborative researchers whose re-envisioning and reformatting of PAR for application with a marginalized gender population may be especially relevant. Many feminist researchers have considerably reworked traditional PAR models to create PAR-informed methodologies which draw also from feminist theory and critical anthropology to construct collaborative approaches that view women as partners in a research process which *may or may not* result in grounded action, and *may or may not* even be conceptualized as ‘research’ in the traditional sense.

¹⁴² PAR can be loosely defined as, “a process of collective, community-based investigation, education, and action for structural and personal transformation,” (Maguire, 1993:157). The underlying tenets of such an approach include, “first, a collective commitment to investigate an issue or problem; second, a desire to engage in self- and collective reflection in order [to] gain clarity about the issue under investigation; and third, a joint decision to engage in individual and/or collective action that leads to a useful solution which benefits the people involved,” (McIntyre, 2000:15).

¹⁴³ As Gupta and Ferguson note, “the programs of ‘action anthropology’ (cf. Tax 1975) too often tended to assume a white, middle-class anthropologist who would go ‘there’, into ‘the field’, and be a catalyst, organizer, or broker for ‘the local people’,” (1997:24). Similarly, Maguire notes that, “[p]articipatory research has highlighted the centrality of power in the social construction of knowledge, yet it has largely ignored the centrality of male power in that construction,” (1993:163). Others have commented more generally on the notion that PAR is about, “how ‘we’ can help ‘them’ – something that too often frames collaborative research projects where university people (outsiders) enter communities to ‘help’ local residents (insiders),” (McIntyre, 2000:6).

In contrast to traditional PAR methodologies where the local community determines the research agenda, feminist researcher Elizabeth Enslin noted that her attempt at a collaborative methodology was not, “a straightforward process in which ‘local people’ simply define and participate in a collective research project,” (1994:553) for as she notes, “I cannot simply sit down with some women in Gunjanager and blindly ask: ‘what kind of research would you like to do with me?’ this naïve question assumes that all of us have equal knowledge and power to design and carry out something called ‘research’,” (ibid.). Often formal ‘research’ may not even be part of a groups agenda, as PAR researcher Patricia Maguire found to be the case in her work with a battered women’s group¹⁴⁴. In this example Maguire responded to her groups need, reformulating her agenda so that the group operated as, “primarily a consciousness-raising support group, not a ‘research’ group,” (1993:167).

This type of flexibility and the ability to respond to group members needs is central in a feminist and critical approach to not only the process, but also the outcomes, of PAR. For, as Gibson-Graham states, “[a]ction research need not focus upon the uncovering or construction of a unified consciousness upon which later interventions will be based. Action research can be a means by which we ‘develop political conversation(s) among a complex and diverse ‘we’,” (1994:220). The importance of engaging in these political conversations is also touted by researchers working within an ‘engaged anthropology’ framework towards,

¹⁴⁴ When Patricia Maguire asked her participants what they would like their group to accomplish, “[t]hey named such purposes as getting together to talk, support each other, and share ideas for handling their problems. No one said, ‘Let’s do research’,” (1993:166).

an enactment of what Paolo Freire called ‘conscientization’: that is, a way of knowing that helps people engaged in struggle become aware of the larger structures that impinge on the conditions of their everyday lives so that the possibilities for political transformation are recognized, *even when they are not immediately acted upon*¹⁴⁵. (Brin Hyatt and Lyon-Callo, 2003:136 – my emphasis)

It was exactly these types of political conversations that I sought to produce in – and through - my research. For while having research subjects produce, “knowledge about themselves,” (Maguire, 1993:173) is, “not revolutionary, nor [does it] contribute to major social transformation...[it does] begin to challenge the oppression of silence and isolation,” (Maguire, 1993:174). Such an approach may be particularly important when working with marginalized groups for which, “outside intervention has already initiated an insidious process of disempowerment by defining expert knowledge and power as *external*,” (Enslin, 1994:553 – my emphasis). This may be especially the case in regards to youth who are often the topic of ‘expert discourses’, but are rarely viewed as ‘experts’ themselves.

In contrast, I drew upon a feminist approach to collaborative and participatory methodologies that provides, “opportunities for codeveloping processes *with* people rather than *for* people. It is a counter hegemonic paradigm that emphasizes among other things the promotion of critical self-awareness about one’s lived experiences,” (McIntyre, 2000:3). In this approach participants can work against the hegemony of expert discourses and “begin piecing together fragments of what they already know into critical

¹⁴⁵ In their explorations of engaged anthropology, Brin Hyatt and Lyon-Callo contend that anthropologists working with marginalized communities, “have a particular responsibility to engage with our ethnographic subjects as partners and collaborators and even as co-activists toward the goal of bringing about social change and social justice,” (2003:134).

knowledge,” (Enslin, 1994:554) which may actually undermine hegemonic expert discourses. As Gibson-Graham notes,

Conversations can produce alternative discourses that entail new subject positions, supplementing or supplanting those that currently exist. These new subject positions crystallize power in new sites, enabling novel performances – individual or group interventions in a variety of social locations. In this way the creation of alternative discourses subverts the power of existing discourses and contributes to their destabilization. (1994:220).

In an era when anthropologists are increasingly held responsible for addressing “the issue of rising inequalities and oppression...engaging in dialogue with the people with whom we ally ourselves in our ethnographic encounters,” (Brin Hyatt and Lyon-Callo, 2003:138) can be a tool for generating acts of ‘discursive destabilization’ (Gibson-Graham, 1994). It is this same approach which characterizes the ethnographic methodologies I put to use in my own research – methods that prioritized conversation towards conscientization, or what Freire described as “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality,” (1970:17). In these conversations researchers and ‘the researched’ work together “to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves,” (Freire, 1970:64).

This cogeneration of critical discussions was central to my own methodology, for as Freire notes, we cannot go into communities, “in order to bring them a message of ‘salvation’, but in order to come to know *through dialogue with them* both their objective situation and their awareness of that situation,” (1970:76 – my emphasis). Such dialogue in many ways began years before I started my research project, and in some ways it has not yet ceased. Indeed, long before I was ‘Kaila the researcher’ or even ‘Kaila the co-

researcher' (and in some cases further down the line, 'Kaila, my friend') I was 'Kaila the youth advisor at a community-based youth group'. Indeed, this initial identity/relationship would set the stage for not only the research project as initially envisioned, but also the far messier (yet more interesting) research project that was ultimately produced, to which we now turn our attention in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE RESEARCH

In The Beginning...

In any ethnographic study it does not suffice to say that young people were observed and their social practices and communications analyzed. Rather, it is *the ways in which relationships with the young people were established* and the resultant degree of access to their everyday lives which is vital if participant observation is to be accepted as a worthwhile research tool. As an approach ethnography requires that research is conducted within the social context of the participants lives. *Thus researchers must take into account, and account for, the relationships that existed within the research process, the impact that the researcher has on the data being generated and the social context itself.* (Emond 2003:106 - my emphasis)

As noted in my introduction, the impetus for my research project was born out of the discomforts I felt and the disjunctures I identified between ‘queer youth’ as *an analytic object* I read about in academic scholarship, *a target population* I helped construct policies for on the Council on Massachusetts’ Adolescents, and as *individuals* I had come to know well at Hilltown Sexual Minority and Allied Kids (SMAK), where I had originally planned to conduct research. When I left SMAK however, I had a full list of names and numbers of youth who wanted to be a part of my research project, and not a clue about how to proceed. But over the next few months three interesting things happened that would ultimately change both the shape – and later the focus – of the research.

First, after leaving SMAK, my relationships with several of the youth began to grow – as we were able to spend time together outside of the organization’s rules, so too were we able to build deeper and more honest relationships – with some, even

friendships. Secondly, I began to write my research prospectus where I became clearer about what I was interested in exploring, and third, I accepted a teaching position and a fellowship at Hilltown Community College (HCC). The following semester I looked out at my classroom at HCC to see three very familiar faces: three former SMAK youth who had enrolled in my class – one of whom would become a co-researcher and collaborator in ways that far surpassed my initial ‘plan’ for a participatory research project. This collaboration turned out to not only be a method of the project, but ultimately would itself become an analytic object of the research. Thus our collaboration is at the heart of this project – which is as much an ethnography *about* ethnography (the process and the product) as it is an ethnography about youth in Hilltown. While Birdie and I will reflect more on our collaboration in the postscript, I begin here at the beginning - with an introduction to our collaborative process.

Talking About ‘Talking About People’: The Training Part One

Instead of looking for a subject to observe, ethnographers look for an informant to teach them the culture...An informant is neither a subject in a scientific experiment nor a respondent who answers the investigator’s questions. An informant is a teacher who has a special kind of pupil: a professional anthropologist. In this unique relationship a transformation occurs in the anthropologist’s understanding of an alien culture. It is the informant who transforms the anthropologist from a tourist into an ethnographer. (Spradley and McCurdy 2006:4)

In the introduction to his cultural anthropology textbook William A. Haviland draws upon British anthropologist Lucy Mairs’ definition of anthropology as ‘talking about people’ as a “disciplined, engrossing, and enriching experience leading to important personal and social insights,” (2006:1). The seeds of my own collaborative project were, indeed, rooted in this type of approach to ethnographic exploration. Indeed, the class I

taught just prior to undertaking my research was an introduction to sociolinguistic anthropology, and so my students did a fair amount of ‘talking about people’ and also exploring the role of power in both the ‘talking’ and in the analysis of what such discussions revealed. Among the students in that class was a young woman named Birdie who I had first known as a participant at SMAK. Homeschooled and only 17 at the time, Birdie was an astute student – bright, articulate and actively engaged. She had also become a friend – one of the SMAK youth with whom my relationship deepened after leaving the organization. Throughout the semester Birdie and I interacted both inside and outside of the classroom, and she quickly became a sounding board for my thoughts on my upcoming research. Thanks to the fellowship provided to me by Hilltown Community College (HCC), I hired her during the summer of 2006 as an official co-researcher in my project.

What transpired over the next year and a half was a gradual transformation: while we began in traditional fashion with myself as the teacher and Birdie as the student (a relationship we were both comfortable in) our process lead to an inversion of these roles, as Spradley & McCurdy (2006) note is crucial in the relationship between ‘informant’ and anthropologist - where Birdie became my teacher and I her student (a relationship we were decidedly less comfortable in, and one which filled many of our days with endless talking about people – most often, ourselves). But before we get there, let me begin back at the beginning when we knew ‘where we stood’ – I at the front of the classroom and Birdie sitting at a desk listening to my presentation of a research prospectus filled equally with jargon and high hopes. As a student in my course Birdie had already learned some of the key concepts and theories in anthropology, and so the jargon didn’t phase her –

indeed she grasped quickly my analytic questions about youth, class, and sexuality in this rural community. As a friend who had spent a lot of time with me and had heard about all my plans for the project she was also un-phased by my high hopes, my intentions to bring my research findings to bear on policy formation and program implementation (at the time neither of us knew it was these best of intentions that would so often lead to our endless fretting about the project and ourselves).

But back at the beginning, sitting in a stuffy classroom at HCC we seemed to be on terra firma – I ‘explained’ it, Birdie ‘got’ it, and so ‘it’ began. After my powerpoint presentation I supplemented with a short introduction to the history of cultural anthropology, discussing some of the key theories and paradigm shifts in the discipline especially relevant to the type of ethnographic research we would be undertaking. I talked about ‘armchair anthropologists’, fieldwork, ‘native anthropology’, and some of the debates regarding power and representation during the ethnographic process and product. I even gave her – or rather us – an assignment: after the meeting we would each read the first chapter from the book *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (a chapter I often used in my Introduction to Cultural Anthropology class which, I believed, worked as an accessible and interesting introduction to key issues regarding positionality and the way we ‘frame’ our findings). We would then each ‘write up’ our fieldnotes about our initial meeting, and would come together two days later to share what we had produced. This next meeting would begin our real methodological training – but it would also simultaneously act as a ‘crash course’ in analytic training. Indeed, I wouldn’t be simply teaching Birdie about how to collect data (a somewhat straightforward enterprise) rather I

would also – and perhaps more importantly – be teaching her how to *make sense* of what we found (a decidedly less straightforward endeavor).

We audiotaped this second discussion, and in this section I draw extensively directly from the transcript – as the ‘raw data’ speaks to the *how* of our process better than any ‘cooked’ summary ever could, and so the readers can see for themselves our familiarity with each other and our easy back and forth (indeed, this was one of the only aspects of our research that would ever be ‘easy’). In fact, our ease in conversation which worked so well in the beginning would in some ways hinder us later on, as we could – and often did - talk ourselves in endless hermeneutic circles. Little did I know that this first transcript would be the first of many taped discussions of us talking about ‘talking about people’.

KAILA: so what we did for this time is we both read the first chapter for Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, and we both *took* fieldnotes

BIRDIE: yes

KAILA: yours is typed, mine...

BIRDIE: handwritten

KAILA: [laughing] is handwritten. So...how do you want to start?

BIRDIE: let's hear yours first

KAILA: you want me to *read* it?

BIRDIE: yeah

KAILA: *out loud*?

BIRDIE: yeah

KAILA: really?

BIRDIE: yeah

KAILA: [sigh] ok. So I put “on Monday co-research Birdie and I met at The Cafe at noon for a research meeting. We went to HCC to do an intro into ethnographic research methods. It was dead at HCC as it was July 3rd. Printed out some stuff and then headed to the old 104 classroom, I really didn't know how to begin and I had my 104 intro to ethnography notes but I didn't want it to seem too ‘school like’ but we were in a classroom and I was standing and Birdie was sitting at the table and we both went into familiar teacher-student role, at least in part”, um, and I said “that was somewhat easier because Birdie was in 105 this semester. So I did the overview of anthropology from armchair anthropology to native and feminist, and it was weird because I felt disorganized, and I had no idea how to structure the meeting and was concerned it would be boring or academic or

confusing, plus it's all just overwhelming anyway, the whole research – what the hell I'm doing, etc. – but it was also a part of the prospectus that I really wanted to share because the emotional and relationship and participatory piece is such a big part of the project for me but was completely absent in the powerpoint presentation which I had shown Birdie last week. But I hadn't been able to really vocalize that aspect of the research to Birdie before. It was good, generated a good discussion, and I felt that Birdie got to see and understand the complications around the research i.e. even going to SMAK is so complicated because of consent and ethics etc. plus all the different layers we're looking at. As Birdie pointed out looking at youth and sexuality and class, etc. I felt like 'ok, it's not just me this is complicated' and it's hard to know how to start and it felt good to share that with Birdie and be like 'ok, what do we do now, how do we start?' It's like I don't have a clear picture of how all this is going to run. Then on top of the three things like youth, sexuality and class there's also the participatory part too. We talked about objectivity and subjectivity – very interesting. We decided to both read the first chapter of *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* and write up our own fieldnotes of that meeting which is this. And one, I forgot that I hate to write these things, but it's really good, I'm glad we did that. Birdie helps me be accountable in all of this which is really good and feels like I'm doing something even if I, at the same time, feel paralyzed with the research and confused. And two, it also feels really edited to me, like I'm writing it with the knowledge that we'll read it together and share it so I wonder how it would be different without that. But really, it just probably wouldn't be written at all." [We both laugh] I said "now we'll move onto interviews, maybe practice interviews with each other, maybe make contact with SMAK and do observation, etc. it feels like a slow start but I think if Birdie hadn't signed on as a research assistant, I don't think there would be any start at all." And that's what I put.

BIRDIE: so now I have to read. Alright. [clears throat jokingly]. A-hem. Ok, "after a moment of organizing materials for the research project that I am assisting in, Kaila the ethnographer-

KAILA: oh! Yeah, very good!

BIRDIE: of GLBTQ youth research, as well as a long time friend, former youth advisor, and anthropology teacher, began writing on the green chalk board in the classroom at HCC that once accommodated a class full of her students-

KAILA: wow

BIRDIE: Kaila is 29 and approximately 5-5 with bouncy [both laughing] curly highlighted hair, she is teaching me about research methods including ethnography. I was comfortable and confident when she began her 'lecture' [she uses air quotes here] and I soon found myself only barely taking notes and grasping the information quickly enough to listen to the next bit of exciting information plus take those notes, without my head feeling slightly confused. To call it lecturing is misleading – Kaila was talking to me about fieldwork, which is something that I need to gain more knowledge about in order to successfully do work that will benefit the project. It is obvious from the way she writes on the chalkboard effortlessly while talking quickly that she is familiar with the position she is in as instructor. She talked about armchair anthros and I felt like youth are

being viewed at with a similar lens of a ‘disconnected other’. I feel that no research can be completely accurate so it makes it difficult for me to trust any research and methods of research – there are so many aspects to the universe, to the physical body, and mind and so many different ideas to different people about which things are relevant to take into consideration when studying a human or group of humans. I think that I need to remember the fact” – so I kinda wrote more about my inner

KAILA: no, this is great

BIRDIE: “I think that I need to remember the fact that I am going to receive truth to a certain extent and understand certain layers but there’s always also the hidden aspects that may never be uncovered. I have a hard time trusting that we are looking in the right places or asking the right questions to understand things that may be embedded at a level that we aren’t reaching. I was confused between subjectivity and objectivity for a couple of minutes there and Kaila was able to understand that I had the meanings, but only switched around by mistake. We overlooked a consent form developed to protect youth participants in the research project. We had no set time limits for the day but ended after about two hours”. That’s all.

KAILA: Wow. That’s awesome

BIRDIE: Those are my fieldnotes.

In this first excerpt I am clearly struggling with questions about how to conduct the research while Birdie wrestled with questions about what we would ‘find out’. Though I could never have imagined it at the time, these concerns would remain prominent for each of us throughout the entire project: I spun in circles about *how* we would find things out and Birdie in turn spun in circles about *what* we found. Or, in other words, I focused often on questions about and questioning the *process* and Birdie was often concerned with questioning the *product*. There we were – the ‘Crisis of Representation’ materialized! In reflecting upon her fieldnotes Birdie expounded upon her distress.

BIRDIE: I know it was just hard cause I was like what...I don’t know like...I didn’t know if I was supposed to detach myself from it and look from like another point of view

KAILA: right

BIRDIE: you know what I mean? But my feelings are so intertwined with everything that’s happening in my perspective so...like I couldn’t write about like how you were feeling, you know what I mean? Or, and I couldn’t even interpret like your body language or anything and perceive it as this or that, cause that’s *my* perception, you know what I mean?

KAILA: yeah

BIRDIE: so it was just like ‘oh my god, how do people do this?!?!?’

KAILA: it’s really hard!

BIRDIE: and do research and like know that that’s the truth and not just...you know, perception

Perhaps years of graduate training in postmodernism and deconstruction had left me more comfortable with anti-positivist exploration, but Birdie on the other hand was wrestling with questions of ‘truth’ versus ‘perception’. And I don’t mean that in a pejorative way - I’m not dismissing such ideas as the ruminations of youth – rather I think this is a huge and important question. While I might philosophically think such a question has no answer at all – in that room on that July day I certainly had no answer to give, and so instead I tried to shift her thinking away from ‘fact’ and ‘truth’.

KAILA: no I think that’s interesting because we both wrote about sort of like our own...like we didn’t write about what we thought the other person was feeling or thinking at all, and what’s interesting about that is like...cause in this chapter they talk about the point of ethnography and your fieldnotes is to get like sort of the indigenous perspective, which is like the native point of view and stuff

BIRDIE: right

KAILA: and it’s like how do you do that if your always experiencing things from your own experience? And like the good thing like with the three different people in line in the grocery store [the example of three different fieldnotes given in the chapter we read] – it’s like, none – no one of those is truth, like they’re all true, and none of them are true because it’s different peoples experience.

In changing the issue from one of Truth to one of truths based on perspectives I wanted to highlight the importance of our own positionality in determining how and what we see. Birdie picked up on this quickly noting that “to study a group of people...it just seems silly because...like I am part of a group of females, so you could get me and so many other females together and you could try to make correlations and everything and create a whole theory but...how true is that to each individual even though it’s what your experience is seeing them?”. And then two things happened. First, I understood a little better that her initial struggle wasn’t necessarily about ‘capital T’ truth but rather the

disconnects between how one is viewed by others versus how they may view themselves, especially around ‘identity groupings’. And this was actually in line exactly with the kind of disconnects I had identified in policy/academic discourse about queer youth versus the actual youth I knew. Second, this presented me with an opportunity to connect her struggle, and her adept line of questioning, to both the methods of ethnography (the process) and the ultimate goals of the research¹⁴⁶ (the products).

KAILA: like you said that something about youth are –

BIRDIE: like the armchair anthros you were talking about?

KAILA: yeah

BIRDIE: yeah, I just feel like the same sort of thing is happening in the studies in Time magazine or whatever - it looks like it’s just people looking at you know, material and not really connecting with it, and doing the same thing

KAILA: absolutely. And not talking to people who are actually living it, and at the same time like it creates this whole – this whole group of ‘youth’ as a group, but that’s also false

BIRDIE: right

KAILA: like you don’t feel connected to other people because they’re 17.

BIRDIE: right, exactly

KAILA: but, to policy makers and stuff you *all are* grouped in the same way. So it’s like how do you both hold that contradiction that that group doesn’t really exist, and at the same time that – in terms of policy and media – the group *does* exist. And then what’s the point? Like what do you want to do with the research? Do you want to like...intervene upon that idea? How do you go about doing that? I mean, that’s really where I just feel stuck. Cause I feel like what you’re saying is totally right and then I get to that question of like ‘well, so what?’ like I feel this in anthropology all the time, like I’ll go and hear – and this is the example I always give – I’ll go hear a brilliant paper on the style of hats in this one village in Peru from 1954 to 1958. like, ok that’s really smart, it’s really thorough...but so what? What difference does that make? Tell me how this research is interesting, or useful, how is it anything other than just really smart and filled with a bunch of big words?

BIRDIE: right

KAILA: like what’s the point?

BIRDIE: what are you going to *do* with that research?

KAILA: exactly. And given that like you know I came to the research because of these relationships and because I wanna have...I do want to help people empower

¹⁴⁶ My ultimate goal, I should clarify, as Birdie would later have research goals of her own.

themselves and speak against some of these things...but then it can get to not only the 'so what' question, but like how do you even do that? You know? And what's the point? And *can* you do that? Like can you really make a difference in how people are thought of and then how would you go about doing that?

BIRDIE: well I think that you can make a difference for how people view *themselves*, like their own interpretation of what they're seeing and what they feel, and then like that will then make a difference in how they interact with people, you know what I mean, and then slowly start to spread that, but that's about it.

KAILA: right, but that takes a certain level of self-reflexivity on the part of the person too, right?

BIRDIE: yep

KAILA: and you're saying like we might be looking at things...and there may be layers we can't even get to, and there may be people who – just aren't thinking on those levels and it's not relevant to their lives

BIRDIE: right now, yeah. I know, it's really ...tricky

But tricky or not, we had to find a way to begin, and in terms of training we started with the most basic anthropological tool – fieldnotes. In regards to the fieldnotes she had already written – our first 'assignment' – she asked me what she should be doing differently. I told her that I didn't think she needed to do anything differently, that it was just perfect as it was. Her subsequent questions regarding the importance and use of fieldnotes pushed me to articulate more explicitly the reasoning for, and benefits of, ethnographic methods.

BIRDIE: so how is this helpful for me, what can I do when I look over my fieldnotes and then use them? Like it was – you know what I mean, just to kind of like see myself from another point of view or something?

KAILA: well I think also part of – it's different when you're

BIRDIE: recording it

KAILA: recording it, and like also what they're talking about here is that you know eventually you're gonna produce this ethnography – have you ever seen an ethnography?

BIRDIE: mm-mm [negative]

KAILA: so I should bring...um...a good example of an ethnography. So ultimately like – so for me, I'm supposed to be doing this research right, and then next year I'll sit down with all of my notes and try to write this ethnography up. And it's like you know, on this day you know when we did this, like obviously I was having a lot of issues about how to do the research, how to proceed, all this stuff...but six months later when I'm writing it...maybe I don't feel that way at

all and I'll look at this note and be like 'oh!'. So it's really designed to sort of in part take you back to that day to sort of experience how you were feeling and what happened and help jog your memory because if you think about somebody going to another culture, or just doing this study for like 6 months or 8 months or a year...like how many things you think you'll remember that at the end of the day, or by the next week you don't remember, it's just not important. If you think about all those private jokes you have with somebody and then like a month or two later your like 'what was that? What was that thing we used to say? Why did we say that?'. And here it's like you have – it's like keeping a diary, you have this record of it, and to track not only what you did but also *your* own experience and how your experience changed as you... in that example, become more familiar with the culture and stuff, but also just like...to track, not only what you did but also your development, without 'development' meaning there's a norm that your trying to get to

BIRDIE: right

KAILA: but just like – your own evolution, like how you change.

BIRDIE: your process

KAILA: yeah, your process, thank you, that's the word I'm looking for.

And key to this process was reflexivity – a constant monitoring of oneself and ones own positionality and perspectives in the research. For I believed, as Hodgkinson states, that in 'insider research', "ensuring that one's position of social proximity is beneficial rather than problematic requires an *ongoing reflexive and reactive approach* to the ways one is positioned and the potential implications of these throughout the research process," (2005:46 – my emphasis). Our introduction to this topic here is interesting because it actually foreshadows many of the struggles we would face during the course of the research regarding collaboration and our individual perspectives, but it also explains the benefits of a collaborative methodology that employed 'multiple positionalities'.

BIRDIE: yeah, so I guess this is just giving different frames and different like...it's good that your doing it from your perspective, it's not another...

KAILA: right, and that's what's interesting about doing something collaborative is that you have like two different people who are both sort of supposedly experiencing the same thing but it sort of illustrates for you how different the experience is.

BIRDIE: right

KAILA: so yeah, that's the thing is that ALL of the research is gonna be really subjective...as much as like for me, I might try to put myself in somebody's shoes

whose a youth in Hilltown, whatever that means, there's all these ways in which I can't do that. And for you too –

BIRDIE: well who's the youth?

KAILA: exactly

BIRDIE: [in sarcastic tone] which *one* youth?

KAILA: yeah, exactly. And that's why it's good to have it be lots of different perspectives.

In discussing this issue, I realize now, I was teaching Birdie to begin asking the kinds of questions an anthropologist would ask - I was trying to get Birdie to begin 'thinking like an anthropologist'¹⁴⁷, and perhaps more specifically, to begin thinking like an *ethnographer*. In other words, I wanted her to not only understand the benefits of ethnographic research 'in theory', I wanted (needed?) her to 'believe in' ethnographic methods as a vital alternative to, and intervention into, much of the quantitative research done 'on' queer youth. Indeed, the working title for our project at the time - "They Turned Our Stories Into Statistics" - was meant to index that we would bridge the gap between survey and story by speaking to and about youth experiences in ways that statistics never could. For me, this meant letting the stories – and the youth – speak for themselves.

KAILA: ...its like you wanna almost introduce policy makers to these people, even though we can't use their names and things like that – but to give them something more in depth than...um, you know 'this percentage of people in Hilltown don't go to college' – well instead it's like 'meet Drew or our alias for Drew and this is what his life has been like and this is what'..you know, and he's sort of like.....he's the person who we're going to talk about *this* aspect through....and like the army, Mack's gonna help us sort of like tell that story, and then it'll branch out more...but what I want to get away from is like survey and percentage, even though some of those things need to be there, but to really have people be like...

BIRDIE: the storytellers.

¹⁴⁷ I draw this phrasing from an introduction to cultural anthropology textbook of the same title (2007).

KAILA: the storytellers. [whispering] the storytellers – that’s really good! Birdie! I like – that gives me something to hold onto...I like this idea of storytellers!

This ‘storytellers’ motif would also underscore the methods we used – ones rooted in relationships that had already been formed. Indeed, I conceptualized relationship-based qualitative research as an important alternative to statistical explorations as I thought it more likely to both yield ‘deep data’¹⁴⁸ as well as protect the research participants. For me, at least initially, the ethical questions raised in youth research were in part ‘solved’ because of my prior relationships with my ‘informants’. I conceptualized my “primary ethical obligation [as] to the young people involved in the research,” (Stuart, 2001:37) and believed that “their expectations [would] hold my accountability more firmly to task than any overseeing institutional infrastructure ever could,” (Gray, 2004:73). But as others, like Stacey (1988) point out, relationship-based research can actually be more ‘dangerous’ than traditional methods, as it can raise additional personal and ethical concerns. I had thought about these issues long and hard, but I wasn’t alone in this project anymore, and I needed Birdie to understand the depth of the ethical dilemmas we might face in the field. I raised this issue in our training meeting by talking about some preliminary research I had done with Mack – one of our key ‘storytellers’ – whose story would raise a set of critical ethical questions for us and for this research endeavor. One afternoon Mack, who had enlisted in the Marines at the age of 17 with parental consent, had told me about her weekend trainings (she wouldn’t be going to the official training camp until the school year was over). As I told the story to Birdie:

¹⁴⁸ Here I draw upon the dissonance between the information yielded in quantitative research, or what Geertz (1973:12) refers to as ‘thinned description’, and ethnographic research – or what Geertz refers to as ‘thick description’ (ibid.).

KAILA: Mack said something about how when she goes to training camp they bunk her with five girls and I was like 'woah Mack that's dangerous for you' [Birdie laughs]. I joked about her like making little notches [on the bed post] or whatever and she was like 'No. girls are the last thing on my mind when I'm there' and I was like why? And she was like 'cause this [being in the Marines] is something I've wanted for a really long time and I don't want to do anything to fuck it up'. And I was like 'why is it something you've wanted for a long time?' and she said 'because I looked around at my family and none of them ever made anything of themselves and none of them ever did anything with their lives and I knew that I would be the same way unless I got out and this was the only way that I could get out'

BIRDIE: wow

KAILA: and I was like-

BIRDIE: that's scary!

KAILA: so scary! And at the same time like – and that's when you get sort of that – research can make you feel kinda like gross sometimes because it's like...the friend part of me is like...god, that's deep and painful and that's so hard and that's so sad because really there are other ways she could have gotten out if she had maybe had access to some of those resources...and the researcher part of me is like 'that quote is brilliant!' you know, 'write that down! That's a really important thing'! and then you kinda feel like 'ew!' because your doing this thing where your like 'Kaila the researcher/Kaila the friend' you know, and it's hard

BIRDIE: totally

KAILA: and part of it just makes you feel gross like you're using people even though...you are and you aren't. Like all research is – exploits people but there's different ways where you can have it make a difference – but like if you're somebody who thinks about these things, I think research can be paralyzing because your like 'oh I feel gross, I feel like I'm using people'. And if your not someone who thinks about those things, you go into the field and you do your fieldnotes and you never worry about the things you said in yours and you never think about power and ethics and then you come home and you write it up and you publish it. It's really easy. And if you are somebody who thinks more critically about that, it can be really paralyzing cause your like 'ahh...I don't wanna'...

BIRDIE: and *you're* taking the research a step farther because you're not only researching but you're trying to create resources and stuff so...that gets trickier too because while your researching your also like kinda playing teacher, you know what I mean, like your also educating not just keep that boundary, letting that person be whatever

KAILA: yeah, right, trying to actually...be a resource at times as well

BIRDIE: trying to penetrate that boundary

KAILA: yeah, which is different than traditional anthro right? Like they would be like 'don't do that kind of stuff'

BIRDIE: right, yeah

KAILA: but then there's all those ethics – you know, there's people who go and do ethnographies in like famine stricken places or war torn places and it's like do you just take fieldnotes? Or do you do things to help?

BIRDIE: exactly

KAILA: and that's an extreme example but you know

BIRDIE: cause that's something I feel weird and scuzzy about with research too is like-

KAILA: scuzzy [laughing]

BIRDIE: yeah! [laughing] is that an ok word?

KAILA: [laughing] that's an awesome word

BIRDIE: that's the feeling though that I could describe it as, it's just kinda like...cause I'm like really all about making change and stuff so it's weird to have that...

KAILA: and that's the thing, and that's why it's good that we had that conversation the other day cause it's like all of those feelings will come up and that – for how I want this research to be – *should* be there, it *should* be something you're dealing with, like it's okay to feel scuzzy [both laughing] about those things, like you should. I mean, I think you should feel that way, like if people didn't feel that way...I mean on one hand it's paralyzing on the other hand it really makes you a lot more careful and it makes you really think and it's like...I don't know, like Mack to me illustrates some really...she's like – if you had to write a chapter on ethics it would be her story because it's like you know I have that consent form and it's like 'there's always the possibility you could get found out and blah blah blah' and maybe the stakes for you or Chris or Drew isn't that high in terms of being found out, but for Mack...

BIRDIE: it's a big fucking deal

KAILA: it could mean that she isn't in the Marines anymore

BIRDIE: what she sees as her future

KAILA: and then for me – I might [personally] view her not being in the Marines anymore as really positive and good and that's when it gets to sort of like indigenous perspectives, or native perspectives, like...I might not want her to be there but I have to respect that that's *her* decision. And...if she says to me I don't want to be there anymore, can you help me, then, you know, I could use the research to help her, but as long as she wants to be there, then I have to keep my – what I want and my own perspective...

BIRDIE: completely confidential

KAILA: yeah, and keep that to the side and maintain the confidentiality and recognize that – respect her decision even though I think it's a bad one. Or not bad, like I understand it, but I wish it was a different one, but that's when it gets into like, you have to sort of keep your own perspectives and wishes to the side, and be there as a resource for people, without pushing your own agenda, because it might not be their agenda. You know?

BIRDIE: right. Yeah.

By this part of our discussion we were both fading fast. We had covered a lot of ground, we had made a lot of plans and talked about a lot of things and we were both pretty shot from the meeting. We decided to stop taping, go have a smoke break, and then come back and write a consent form for Birdie to bring to that night's meeting at SMAK where she would do her first participant observation, and make connections for interviews. While Birdie would interview a number of people – including me – and would also initiate what would become a second research project that I had not envisioned conducting (which I will return to shortly), her first interview is crucial to this story about training and collaboration, ethics and feeling 'scuzzy', and ultimately central to our analytic findings about SMAK and its' youth.

Birdie Before & After: Rex Interview Take One

I just got off the phone with Rex and we will be meeting for an interview in 45 minutes. Before she called I was reading chapter six of *Researching Youth* and feeling very confused about my own role as researcher. I wonder if I feel more uncomfortable than Rex feels about the interview. Skuzzy is how I feel in this moment and even a little butterflyish in my tummy. It is hard for me to define myself in the role of researcher and youth. I don't want her to feel like I'm 'using her' and I want to feel the same way. I need to center myself into my own personal identity of Birdie and start from there, ranging out to Birdie the youth, [and Birdie] the youth researcher. I am very aware of how I may present myself and how that relates to the interview and data I can collect. This is scary and exciting at the same time.

The above is an excerpt from Birdie's fieldnotes, written directly before her first interview with Rex. Rex was a biological female previously known as Rebecca, who was in the process of exploring a different gender identity. She now called herself Rex but still preferred female pronouns. We both knew Rex from SMAK but she joined the group just about a month before I stopped working there, so we were not all that familiar with her. The day after the interview Birdie gave me the

tape which I quickly transcribed. That night she wrote the following – her second set of fieldnote reflections on this event, from which I include here some important excerpts.

Yesterday after scheduling the interview with Rex I voiced my concerns over a frantic phone call with Kaila. I told her I was feeling nervous and she assured me that this was “normal”. I walked from Hilltown Market where I was having a bite to eat over to the Café for a cigarette before she met me there. I had just finished my butt when her father pulled around the corner in his green Ford pickup and let Rex out on the corner of Main and East. She crossed the street and hugged me. It was apparent to me that she already envisioned me as a youth and a friend, so this role of ‘Researcher’ was more obvious to me than I think it was to her (if that makes sense)...I felt awkward about the interview because I wanted to be friendly also and I was very self conscious. When we sat down at the park and began the interview I was more comfortable. I pulled out the sheet of questions I had written down and began. Something that helped me feel better was telling Rex how nervous I was and asking her how she was feeling. She was confident because she has done a couple interviews prior to this. When the interview was wrapped up I felt like to just leave would be almost like ditching Rex hours before SMAK started. We sat and talked about music, school and homelife...we walked to the Hilltown Youth Services building and I told her I had to head back to Marks to take care of his dog...We hugged and then she held my hand and looked at me saying that she would give me a call and that we should hang out. ‘yeah’, I said, ‘will you be at SMAK next week?’ She said yes and I told her I would definitely see her then...I was happy to be done with the interview and participant observation time and back at Marks...later that night I was relaxing alone at Marks with a pint of Ben and Jerry’s with whipped cream on top. My cell phone rings from the other room. I walk in and glance at the blue glowing screen on the front of my cell phone: REX. My heart skips a beat of surprise and fear. ‘Why is she calling me,’ I think to myself. I say ‘nope’ out loud as I silence the ringing. One minute later and my phone does a jingle telling me there is a voice mail. I push ‘1’ and listen intently. ‘Hi Birdie, It’s Rex. I had a really random question for you [pause] but now I’ve forgotten it. Okay, talk to you later, bye.’ I sit there stunned for a second. Then I think ‘not surprised’. I was told scary stories about this girl being a stalker years ago, I hadn’t considered that perhaps she would call me randomly to question me about things. I had a panicking urge to dial up Kaila and frantically explain what had just happened, [but] I decided to wait and finish my ice cream that I had been distracted from. I’m not going to call her back as mean as that might be, but I’m just not interested in involving myself in an intense friendship with someone I don’t have interest in getting extremely close to.

Indeed, Birdie did call me the next day to tell me about the phone call and her ‘scuzzy’ feelings about her interactions with Rex. In fact, neither of us were completely surprised, as we had both heard stories from other SMAK youth regarding Rex’s (in their words) ‘creepiness’. At the time we had no idea how important such gossip would be for our analytic process. Just about a week after Birdie’s initial interview with Rex we met at HCC, each with our own copy of the interview transcript, which we read to ourselves in silence. We then began taping what would be our first real co-analysis – together deconstructing the interview, trying to figure out what we each thought was ‘going on’ in Rex’s answers and what that might reveal, and planning follow up questions. This session - the real ‘meat’ of training in how to analyze like an anthropologist – is explored in the following section.

Making Sense: A Lesson in Analysis

On a hot July day, in the reprieve of the air conditioned classroom at Hilltown Community College, I began - in standard form – by turning the lens on Birdie, asking her if she had any ‘right off the bat’ thoughts or reactions to reading her interview. She didn’t miss a beat in answering, “well I noticed more things this time around, the way that things were framed or what was said and how she responded to questions and like it was funny because I kind of just dropped the class conversation like – I didn’t get too in depth, get very much information but then – I felt really uncomfortable with pressing into that, and so I just like dropped it... and there were just things I could have elaborated on”. This response perfectly explained one of the key reasons we were doing this ‘read through’ and co-analysis in the first place - as interviewing is indeed a technique that is *learned*, and that everyone who has ever conducted an interview inevitably looks back

over the transcript and sees places where they dropped a question, or didn't follow through with something they later see as important. This speaks to the struggle of interviewing in the moment – and also the benefit of having the opportunity to do follow up interviews. As I explained to Birdie, “so what I think is useful about going through it [the transcript] is like that we can kind of do two things at once – analysis and then also finding gaps for follow up questions.” I reassured her that no matter how many interviews one conducts, when reading over a transcript, “there's always gonna be those places where your like um, ‘I interrupted her, I wonder what she would have said if I had done something differently’,” and that this was both a normal reaction and a key part of the process of ethnographic interviewing.

Birdie was anxious to hear my thoughts on the interview, and in this meeting I wanted to accomplish three important things. First, I wanted to give her feedback on what she had done – which I thought was an excellent first interview. Second, I wanted to walk her through the analytic process to learn how to analyze and also to begin to construct our own analysis about the generated data. Third, I wanted to give her suggestions – a set of methodological tools – to use in follow up interviews. Indeed, I had given Birdie no ‘instructions’ before setting off on her first interview. This was not because I wanted to give her a trial by fire, or see what she came up with on her own, rather it was because I honestly had no idea how to teach someone how to do an interview. I could, on the other hand, work off of a transcript produced by that first interview in order to have both concrete examples and also to know where she needed ‘help’. I didn't prepare in advance for this, but rather let the discussion come about organically. Together we decided that we'd go through the transcript step by step, we'd

make a list of topics to follow up on, and then we'd turn to those at the end to come up with more specific questions. As I should have by now guessed, we wouldn't proceed as planned. Rather, this 'Interviewing 101' lesson quickly turned to a more advanced – and at times more theoretical – deconstruction of the interview. Key parts of this transcript, and my reflections upon them, are included below¹⁴⁹.

KAILA: I think this is a really excellent first interview and it gives us a lot to work off of. And I think there's some interesting things happening so I think we should both do the analysis and do some like follow up questions.

BIRDIE: I agree, I'm interested to hear what you have to say

KAILA: yeah, I think it's great that you just started with 'how do you identify' which is really broad and really open and to think that like – so when we're doing our analysis – you asked 'how do you identify' and she said 'I'm [a] transgendered pansexual', and she could have identified in a million ways right, cause she has a million identities

BIRDIE: right

KAILA: so it's interesting that like, this is what she highlights and we could say – if we sort of think about *why* that is, it might be because she knows, like she knows you from SMAK, she knows what the research-

BIRDIE: context

KAILA: yeah, she knows the context. So like already –

BIRDIE: in her head

KAILA: right, so she already has this frame about what this research is about, and she's going to present to you a particular kind – like she didn't say 'I identify as a youth, I identify as poor, I identify as part of-

BIRDIE: she highlighted sexuality

KAILA: sexuality and gender, right.

Here I was trying to get Birdie to think about how the larger (in her word) 'context'

affects the 'data' – how the prior relationships will affect the information that we get and

how it might 'frame' not only the kinds of questions we ask but also – and more

interestingly – the kinds of responses we elicit. I continued, noting that when Rex says

she is pansexual Birdie asks her what that is, and I told her, "I thought that was great

cause you don't presume to know what that means, and I think that's always really good

¹⁴⁹ Please note that when individual quotations are used it denotes things that we are reading from the original interview transcript.

to do that, even when you have like terms [which you do know] – to sort of say like ‘what does that mean *for you*?’” you know, to get a sense of like pansexual, what that means for *her*”. And here I’m again stressing the importance of the ‘native’ perspective or definition. I continued,

KAILA: and then it was interesting cause she...gives you a very concrete time, she realized she was trans November, 2005. like that’s a very

BIRDIE: it wasn’t any...like no process to get there

KAILA: right! And that’s really interesting! Like if someone was to say like you know ‘when did you realize you were straight or when did you realize you were queer’?

BIRDIE: “growing up, this and this and that...”

KAILA: right! right, [reading from transcript] “it was just declaring that there was a switch. And that was it, and I realized I was trans in November of 2005” so...no lead in. and you did – so this is really good – you ask ‘how did you decide that’. It’s a great question to ask her there. And she says...

BIRDIE: this other girl,

KAILA: Cory

BIRDIE: ‘the way that *she* realized it’, and I didn’t ask like how did she (Cory) come to that realization.

KAILA: right, so right here [in transcript] ‘how she realized she was trans, and the way she realized it, made me realize that I was’...And then she said like, yeah, ‘*how* she realized made me realize’. And [so we might want to ask] “was it a process? Was there a process to it?” Like it almost sounds the way she’s presenting it is that she went and heard this girl talk

BIRDIE: and decided

KAILA: and was like ‘as of today I am trans, that’s what I am’. So we want to know if there was a process, and [we would want to ask] also like “what was it [about Cory’s story]”? “Do you remember what she said?” “Do you remember was there anything particular about her story?” “What was it that you walked away from that meeting going ‘this is what I am now’,” So finding out a little more about Cory’s story [will be important].

But aside from generating some possible follow up questions, there’s another interesting thing happening in our discussion here – something that I would never have known how to ‘plan for’ or ‘explain’ in interview training but something that came about organically in this discussion around Rex’s ‘decision’ to identify as trans. As Birdie says,

BIRDIE:um, but yeah she just realized that that's how she wanted to continue to identify and it wasn't like...I don't know, backing up is that what she wished? Do you know what I mean? Did she – I don't know what I'm trying to say

KAILA: I think you might be getting on a really interesting thing – like sometimes when people when they come out – for instance there's like the “coming out story” – somebody might not come out till their 18 but when they tell the story there's a certain way we tell stories, right, and often times they'll say like

BIRDIE: “in this situation *prior*”

KAILA: right! “When I was little, I always knew I was different, I never liked girls clothes, I never liked boys”, you know, whatever it is, like you back up [in the story telling]. There's like a way we tell stories, there's this narrative structure.

BIRDIE: right

KAILA: in the same way that every bedtime story starts with “once upon a time”. We get these cultural scripts [about how to tell stories]. And she doesn't do that at all, there's no backing up. Is that what you were trying to get at?

BIRDIE: yep, exactly

And this speaks volumes about this process, and about how easily Birdie could ‘get’ concepts, even if she didn't always know the academic terminology. Indeed, the concepts of cultural scripts and narrative structure are hard enough topics to grasp as a graduate researcher, but Birdie seemed to come to these ideas organically – something that continued throughout our research (and something which never ceased to amaze me).

In connecting this issue back to our research I continued on.

KAILA: so that is *really* interesting, and that makes it this really – and if we think about it, and we could be totally wrong, but what we're trying to do [in analysis] is get these little pieces of information and be like “how do we make sense of this?”. So because of what she's giving us – and it might be different when she tells us more, when we push her more, that there's like – that [it sounds like] basically she never thought about this before, she goes to SMAK, she hears a girl *tell a story*, and realizes that's what she is. And that's a really powerful statement about SMAK as a space, the importance of peers in that space...um, how people can pick and choose identities...and how it's different.

BIRDIE: is that also the – about her like latching onto a particular person for other emotional needs?

This was such a great question (and actually a foreshadowing of an analysis I wouldn't come to until reading the transcript some three years later). But in the moment I tried to

connect Birdie's concern about Rex's need to latch onto another person to an anthropological view that takes both the larger context and the actual individual into account. As I said,

and so that's when it gets really complicated, right? We can sort of think – in all of these things we're thinking like macro and micro, like we're thinking structure and then the individual. So structure might be SMAK, it might be the sort of like [the] cultural context in which we're pushed to tell stories in certain ways, and pushed to share certain things, and how she interacts with that. But then the other piece of that is her individual psychology. Because there's not that many people that tell stories like that, so that is also something we want to be careful of – like we want to get more information and then before we say “well this is the power of SMAK” maybe what it is is “well this is a *potential* that SMAK has, especially if your working with a youth who is unsure of her own identity, and maybe”.

Here I'm trying to get us to think anthropologically but also to be wary of making generalizations, to keep our analytic motives in check and to keep the individual (and *their* motives) in our sights. With Rex in particular, this would prove to be incredibly important, as revealed further below.

KAILA: right, maybe latching on, because it's interesting, she's...um...she's perceptive in telling you...as an outsider - and you might have a different perspective – [but as an outside reader] I felt like she was perceptive in searching out and telling you what you wanted to hear. Did you feel that?
BIRDIE: I felt that also...[and] she seems really too aware of what people want to hear or something.

And this was key also in illustrating to Birdie that the crux of the issue wasn't necessarily what Rex was telling us (or how 'true' it was) but rather our interpretation of what she said – that it was our analytic framework and the relationship context that held the most weight in this regard. At the same time I believe that our 'distrust' (for lack of a better term) of Rex and her narratives allowed us the distance to do the kind of critical textual analysis necessary certainly in this training, and one I didn't think at the time we would have been comfortable doing with a youth who we knew better or had more personal

relationships with. But this is not an argument against the kind of relationship-rooted research I envisioned, rather as I would come to find out later, even the little personal relationship we did have with Rex would be critical in our findings.

This is a crucial issue which I will pick up on shortly, but for now let us return to this discussion, to the critical analysis and interview training that transpired in the space created by our questioning of Rex. Indeed, we dove right into a critique of Rex's responses in a way which turned this original interview into a useful training tool about not only how to analyze data, identify gaps and structure follow-up questions but also how to navigate the researcher/researched relationship in the interview – or, what we might call the 'politics of the personal'.

KAILA: [when Rex explains her sexual identity to you the] first thing you ask about that is 'so you talked to your parents about that' and the first person she mentions is '*tried* to talk to my dad'. And her mom's pretty cool with it, but she begins and ends with dad. 'well I tried to talk to my dad, my mom's pretty cool with it'...

BIRDIE: she doesn't continue with it

KAILA: right, she just interjects that. But what sort of hooks you at the beginning and end is 'my dad doesn't really like it that much, he says I've already got two sons, I don't need a third'. Like, that's a pretty powerful statement to make to your child. And that's then a really powerful thing for you to share with someone else. And so to sort of think about ok – you say 'wow, that's weird' and she says 'yeah'. And so that's a place where–

BIRDIE: [I could ask] "how does that make you feel"?

KAILA: right, or, "when did he say that" or "how did you...", – it's interesting actually because in *her* case it's a little different, but like normally if somebody gives you a statement like that, if you think about it like [in an interview] they're giving you this statement and you want to sort of like take it, take the bait and be like "ok, well tell me a little bit more about that, like when did he say that" or

BIRDIE: she offered that

KAILA: right, she offered this, but what's interesting, and this is when the individual person comes into play – is that I think she actually tries to hook you a lot, and you actually don't...

BIRDIE: I cut her off

KAILA: well you could say it one way or the other you could be like "I cut her off" but also it was like you didn't

BIRDIE: take the bait

KAILA: you didn't take the bait. We do want to let them sort of structure the interview but also to sort of have this awareness of when they might be trying to...

BIRDIE: lure..

KAILA: yeah, so. I mean, you might – the next time she offers you something like that, you might want to take it just to see like, what does she have planned out?

BIRDIE: how does it go

KAILA: yeah, how does it go.

When the politics of the personal is, in Birdie's terms, a little bit 'scuzzy', analysis of an interview is tricky to say the least. But every ethnographer deals to some extent with this issue – ethnographers sometimes have to navigate their way around an interviewee they might not trust, or one they may not even like. What is different in collaboration, and in particular in training someone in methods, is that this becomes explicit. And so I think inclusion of our discussion around this issue offers a rare glimpse into what we might call the 'scuzzy side of fieldwork'¹⁵⁰, and the sometimes harsh analysis of individuals that is rarely articulated by ethnographers. My reaction to Rex's story about her dad's comment that he 'doesn't need a third son' offers an example of both this type of analysis and also the spaces for critical reflection that it produces.

KAILA: ...I'm just sort of imagining that for her, that this is a well rehearsed line, right? I bet she's told this story at SMAK, I bet she told it to Karyn [an adult advisor]. And [I bet] she gets a series of intense reactions about it, right? It's like one of those things you know you can say to someone and you'll get some attention. [But] then actually you don't give her that there, so that's really interesting. Um, and that might to work too to sort of keep her on her feet in terms of not just giving you the like, the same thing over and over, to sort of push her a little more

BIRDIE: right

KAILA: so, um, so that drops there. And that is something in the future you can be like [thinking to yourself] "ok, this is a hook" and take it –

¹⁵⁰ Here I'm playing on the title of a recent book *The Shadow Side of Fieldwork* (McLean & Leibing, 2007) which explores some often unarticulated fieldwork issues.

BIRDIE: a lot of these [comments about SMAK that Rex made], yeah, 'I go there to see friends, get support and be supported for who I am', like I could have asked like "you don't feel that support in other areas of your life?"

KAILA: right, and that's sort of how she's leading you – cause if you look at this paragraph, just that statement – if you think about it like this is a story, these three sentences is a story that [Rex is] narrating and the beginning is 'I went there to get away from my father' and 'that meant a lot to me' but now 'it's just to see friends and get support and be supported for who I am' but again she sort of starts it with this getting away from her dad.

BIRDIE: but then she brought him to the [SMAK] barbeque

KAILA: right! And *that* was an interesting piece [when you brought that point up in the interview] because that was really interesting on your part.

Returning to the issue of critical content analysis and questioning of the narrative

frameworks interviewees may draw upon, we reflected more upon Rex's emphasis on her

father's lack of support and I tried to help Birdie link it up with some of the analytic

questions I had posed in my original research prospectus.

KAILA: yeah, so if you think about it – like if you ask me like "how's your family". How different is it for me to be like "well, you know I came out to my mom and she was really really supportive" and talk about that and then be like "but there are other people in my family who aren't". Versus [you asking] "how's your family" and [I say first] "well, my grandparents aren't supportive of it, and neither is my dad, but my mom just wants me to be happy". Like what are you highlighting?

BIRDIE: she's not highlighting the positive, it's all the negative.

KAILA: and again I think it's part of – remember how I talked about how people say that queer youth who talk about [being] 'at risk' [are] just saying [that] about their lives because they are [at risk], [that] it's how they really experience their lives, and my analysis was like no, people know what other people want [to hear] from them. Like especially if you go to SMAK, especially if you're invited to tell your coming out story at a youth panel, what is it that captures the attention? It's not like "well my parents were really supportive" it's like "well I got thrown into my locker, I got beat up". So people tell these stories because they *know*, and this is a really good example of it. You ask this really really broad question and she says 'my grandparents aren't accepting of it' and you say 'they're aware though' and that can almost be read, like it's really interesting, there's this whole little sort of challenge that happens here which I think is really cool, because you can almost make a case that grandparents even *knowing* is something. That if your grandparents are open enough that you could even tell them [that that is something]. And she says 'my mom is cool with it, she just wants me to be happy'

BIRDIE: 'but my dad is really REALLY unaccepting of it, I mean, he's getting better but'

KAILA: 'really REALLY unaccepting'.

BIRDIE: and then I was like 'but the barbeque', I was confused

KAILA: well it's funny though because you challenge her a little, you're like 'but he was at the barbeque right'? And she goes 'yeah' and then you sort of say 'but he looked a little uncomfortable' like [and I read that statement as you being] like 'I'm gonna buy your take on it' sort of thing. And that's just really interesting.

But I wanted to clarify for Birdie that this now easily flowing 'critique' of Rex's narrative was not a critique of Rex herself. Rather Rex's narrative made sense within the structure of the 'support group' – the primary form of queer youth programming.

KAILA: it's not – none of that's saying like she's bad or she's not being honest

BIRDIE: I feel like she probably uses tactics a lot in dealing with her parents too, you know what I mean, create this reality or whatever that her dad is like...

KAILA: I think also um...it is, I think you're right, I think she uses these tactics, and for us to think about it [in terms of] SMAK, or these kind of support groups, like in some ways having a bad coming out story or having a family member who doesn't approve of you can be sort of like um,

BIRDIE: a way to be in the light

KAILA: yeah, like a badge of authenticity. You know like if your just fine and nobody has problems with it

BIRDIE: why are you here

KAILA: why are you here! If this is a support group

BIRDIE: [and] you have to label it that

KAILA: right. And so like – it's interesting that it focuses on her dad and yet he's the one I've seen take her to everything. Um so that would really be something you'd have to use your own judgment about [in asking follow up questions]

This next section leads us into even murkier water, and while this excerpt is difficult for me to include here I believe it speaks to an honest part of the analytic process we engage in when trying to 'figure people out'. Here we question some of Rex's potential 'motives' in this story about her father.

BIRDIE: I wonder what would happen if her parents... if they got divorced if there's already some resentment, reason to be pissed off at her father

KAILA: yeah and plus teenage girls historically [traditionally] go through phases against their dads cause it's [often] really hard being a teenage girl getting the shit you do from men on the street and then reconciling that with the relationship you have with your father. Like I hated my dad for a really long time, I think a lot of [teen] girls do and that's not to say that's all it is for her, but I think there's some

ways in which like certain stories are just more acceptable. And she's not going to be challenged to – like is she going to a place where they're encouraging her to build a relationship with her [dad] or

BIRDIE: well they just see [homophobia]

KAILA: yeah, exactly.

BIRDIE: [they're like] "i'm so sorry to hear that..."

KAILA: especially cause it's [about] support.

At this point we backed off this line of inquiry and I turned to the section where Birdie had asked Rex about class, as it prefigured some of what I saw to be likely difficulties we would face in exploring this topic. We began where Birdie had asked Rex a question about her experience around class.

KAILA: And she says 'yeah, we don't make a lot of money but you know' so there's a place and you said-

BIRDIE: I cut her off

KAILA: [well] you ask about the households and her siblings....

BIRDIE: I was hoping to like hook her again and get her to tell us [about class]

KAILA: I know, you said 'it's a lot of kids to take care of'. And I thought "oh there's Birdie trying to bring class back into the discussion"

BIRDIE: (laughing) I tried!

KAILA: and I thought that was great! And so there's things we can ask there to bring it back to class and I can see you trying to do that there, she just might need more prodding.

But such 'prodding' can be difficult around taboo topics such as class, and indeed that was something I talked about extensively in my prospectus: how to ask about class in a culture where 'class discourse is largely absent' (Ortner, 1991). As part of the training I had also lent Birdie a book by Elizabeth Chin entitled *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture*. Here Birdie made some excellent connections between Chin's methods and framing questions in ways which allow us to access information about class.

BIRDIE: it was interesting to me, I was reading in that book about the kinds of questions she [Chin] asked youth around class and stuff, like "what kind of food do you eat", like you know what I mean, all these specific questions that can give you a bigger picture.

KAILA: right, exactly. So we want to think about asking these broader questions, but sometimes like you said it's [class is] a touchy subject and there are ways, and people often don't talk about class, there's a lot of ways to find out about class without talking about it at such.

BIRDIE: [like] "do you go on vacation with your family"? Or...

KAILA: right, "do you go back to school shopping", "where do you do that"?

Um...all sorts of things. And then you can also ask her straight up questions, but there are definitely some times you need to take the sort of [think about] like, what are the things I could ask about that would tell me about class [without actually asking about it explicitly].

We would struggle with this same issue of how to find out about a topic when an informant may not be explicitly aware of it, by turning to our questions about queer youth as 'at risk', a dominant discourse about this population which this research was designed in part to address by exploring if and how and to what extent youth might identify themselves as being 'at risk'. It became a ripe area for our exploration of how to 'prod' informants and structure follow-up questions without leading them in a particular direction.

KAILA: and then you say um, 'have you guys talked about at risk youth, do you hear that at all'. And she says 'I hear it but there aren't really any at risk youth really at SMAK'.

BIRDIE: right, but that's her perception...I don't know why she – I think that she said that because...I don't know maybe...I don't think I really hinted at all about anything before hand about the surveys or them talking about being at risk, but I guess there's only three people there, so.

KAILA: well I think definitely one thing to ask is

BIRDIE: "what is at risk"

KAILA: yeah, "what is an at risk youth"? Like [you can follow up by asking] "you say there aren't any at risk youth there [at SMAK], what does that mean to you?". You ask her if she feels like she's at risk and she says 'definitely not' so another thing to ask [in a follow-up] is "why don't you feel like you're at risk"? Or "when people say at risk what do they mean", "what does it mean to you", "what do they mean by it". So definitely asking questions a little bit more about her understanding of this term.

BIRDIE: and she says 'it's just helpful to have a place to go'

KAILA: yeah, so a way you can do that is say "in our last interview you said it's just helpful to have a place to do, I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that, like how is it helpful, why is it important". "Is SMAK a place where everyone goes or is it really just for people who identify"...in theory its for allies too [so you could ask] "do you see a lot of allies there", "why is it helpful to have

a place to go”, “who can use this place”, “who should use this space”? Um...and it’s good [when you ask] if she sees it [risk] coming into play at SMAK and she says yeah ‘talking about AIDS prevention stuff, it’s like they assume we’re gonna end up that way’. Well that’s interesting because that *would* make them at risk youth. “At risk” doesn’t mean anything except you have that potential, so that’s something to maybe follow up on, like “you said that people at SMAK assume your gonna end up that way, like, how do you get that message”?

This line of analysis was important for exploring how we – as interviewers – have to frame questions in ways that may not make our own opinions explicit so that the interviewee doesn’t simply produce what she thinks we want to hear (an issue that would be especially important with this particular informant). As an example, I drew Birdie’s attention to the part of the interview when she introduced the book *The New Gay Teenager* and had said “one of the quotes in it is so fucked up, it’s like ‘the new gay teenager doesn’t want to be different from anyone else they just want to um...buy an SUV and fade into the fabric of American life’ – do you feel like that’s true?”

KAILA: And then you talked about *The New Gay Teenager*...I don’t know how you remembered that quote *so well*, I was like oh my god! [laughing] and [you asked] do you feel that that’s true. And I thought that was great.

BIRDIE: it was interesting when she said ‘people always think you should be normal’

KAILA: right, ‘it’s not true for me’ she says. And that might be [like] you say ‘this quote is fucked up’ right, and so she

BIRDIE: oh...yeah.

KAILA: she might pick up on that. But that’s not necessarily bad. And we talked about not pretending we don’t have an analysis. But then also, because there’s different personalities, like you might find that with *her* that you want to keep her guessing about where you stand a little, or might feel like that feels scuzzy to you and you don’t want to – but like you’re always going to be aware that she’s...well she says ‘it’s not true for me, but I know some people who would just like to be able to say that they’re normal’ and this is great [when you say] ‘normal being like...’. That’s wonderful, like you don’t give her [the answer] you just ask what is normal. ‘Normal being like’.... And she says ‘normal being like a straight person’

BIRDIE: ‘middle class’

KAILA: ‘like a normal you know middle class or whatever high class straight person’, and so definitely that’s fascinating – she hasn’t used class to talk about before – [she says] ‘who can afford all those things and be given anything without anyone else giving it a second thought’ – and so that’s, that’s something to ask

about because *she* makes that connection between normal – it's not just straight, but straight and middle class. So that's something that we would wanna ask her about.

In response to this Birdie (re)turned my attention to the issues raised in the interviewer-interviewee interaction, noting, “that’s what was hard... When I was asking some of these questions to her I felt that tension there that she was trying to pick up on things [that I wanted to hear] and then I felt like some of the things I asked she didn’t really know how I wanted it to sound, and didn’t really give me much, you know what I mean? Like searching for that, not finding it and just being like ‘yeah’ or whatever... it made me feel uncomfortable and like... cause it’s OBVIOUS, you know what I mean, to me that there was that there,”. We then tried to problem solve and think about interview strategies regarding the politics of the personal, and I tried to get Birdie to think about her options in such a scenario, introducing her to some important research tools I referred to as her ‘friends’.

KAILA: So what are some of the ways you can deal with that in an interview if you’re picking up on the person, like do you think, if your picking up on the person doing that what are some strategies you might use?

BIRDIE: just like... I don’t know, ask really broad questions and like maybe – jump around some from things and not give as much of my own personal, I don’t know... body language... a lot of things, even non-verbal stuff

KAILA: yup

BIRDIE: eye contact, the way I look at her...

KAILA: right, if your talking to me and I’m doing this [nods up and down] you know like even I disagree with you I’m basically saying “yeah yeah go on go on” so I do that all the time in teaching when people are talking I’m like this right [nodding]. And you might say, and this sounds really trite but it’s a really good tool like – the tools that are your ‘friends’ when interviewing are things like saying “what did you mean by that, tell me more”. Another one of your friends is the phrase “that’s really interesting” because it’s not saying that is good, that it’s bad, just “wow, that’s really interesting, can you tell me a little bit more about what that means *for you*”. Um..and so even if you say – I’ll look at an interview and I’ll be like oh god every other sentence I’m like ‘that’s really interesting, that’s really interesting’ but it’s like one of those things that you develop so that um...it’s giving someone a cue that your listening and your into it and your also not saying necessarily where you stand on it.

BIRDIE: I think that's kind of how – that's what I really wanted to say when I said 'that's weird', you know what I mean – I was looking for that word, 'that's really interesting'.

We concluded this long and intense discussion with a more positive feedback, as I wanted to reiterate to Birdie that she had done an excellent job in her first interview, and that that was no small feat. We ended that day feeling like we accomplished a lot, though I was hoping that the information wasn't too overwhelming for her. That night in her fieldnotes she reflected upon the day's events noting that, "It wasn't too painful. I think it was a bit astounding for me actually, I am impressed with myself for what I'm doing right now. I was thankful for the air conditioning at HCC and Kaila's helpfulness about suggesting tools that I could use for the next interview, she helped me to see where Rex tried to 'bait me' and how I didn't 'take the bait'. We generated more questions for me to ask in a second interview with Rex." Though we didn't know it at the time, Rex would continue to call Birdie, inviting her to hang out and trying to connect as friends, which made Birdie increasingly uncomfortable. As a buffer to this, we agreed to make the next interview a collaboration where Birdie and I would together visit Rex at her house and conduct the follow-up interview.

Rex's Interview: Take(s) Two

Kaila and I met at the Café around 10:20 a.m. She was only 5 minutes late. She stood in line for food as I thought about questions that might be helpful for the interview we were doing together at 11 a.m. with Rex. We were to drive together in Kaila's car to Northeast Hilltown where Rex was to just be getting back to her dad's house from church. Kaila appeared well awake as we chatted at the Café before the adventure to the boonies and she commented about the relaxed unattentive state that inhibits me in the mornings. To be honest, I wasn't really feeling the interview idea today. I am annoyed with this research participant because she is very difficult for me to understand. Kaila grabbed her bagel & coffee and we set off to the car...Kaila followed the directions I repeated to her from the pink post-it I wrote on at Marks the day before, the directions came straight from Rex herself. We drove further and higher into Northeast Hilltown wondering how much farther until we came across [the house]. I called Rex to

confirm directions and she put me on the phone with her father. We got cut off because – hello, we were in the boonies!...We found ourselves at Rex's a few minutes later. We went up the driveway and found land, a big golden dog and a very nice looking house. Rex and her father pulled in a minute after us in his Ford truck which he had taken to go look for us in [when we were lost]. Her house was very much a home. Pictures decorated the fridge, her younger brothers were in their area of the house (basement) and Rex's room had a small couch, computer, bed, posters of Seabiscuit and the Pirates of the Caribbean. Toy horses stood up, displayed on her bureau. There was a deck also. We were offered food and drinks by her stepmom after she joked with us about how she had hid [when we first pulled in the driveway] thinking we were Jehovah's witnesses. Rex, Kaila and I walked into the field that surrounded the house and sat in the grass to begin the interview. Not even 5 minutes into it and her dad brings us a blanket to sit on. It was funny to me that I have heard her say her father is unsupportive and yet here he is being very considerate two times in twenty minutes...The interview went okay. I wasn't really feeling it so I kinda forced Kaila to do the talking simply by not talking [myself]. It was good for me to just listen and watch it done by the pro so that I pick up new techniques. Kaila really worked at getting a complete understanding of that person's subjective experience and perceptions by getting clarification on what something as basic as 'support' means to that particular person. I think that I need to let go of my fear of asking too much or prying because it's what the job entails. Also I felt like I was having a hard time staying focused on her words and not jumping to what the things she was saying meant about her as a [here the word 'subject' is crossed out] person. The things she told us were very interesting to say the least. I can't really seem to 'figure' her 'out'.... [Excerpt from Birdie's fieldnotes]

Actually, what had occurred in the interview was, in hindsight, fairly predictable. As planned, we followed up on some of the gaps identified in her first interview. I include not much of the actual 'data' from the interview here, but rather focus on just a few excerpts which had us questioning Rex in the moment – and which years later when I returned to this transcript, had me questioning myself as an ethnographer. We began by asking Rex to expound on Cory – the individual whom she credited as helping her figure out her own identity. Rex told us that when Cory first came to SMAK, "she didn't really know what she was...which is, of course, what SMAK is so helpful with". She continued, explaining that she and Cory spent some time together outside of the SMAK

meetings. One day while they were on a walk, Rex said, Cory shared some personal information. It was how Rex followed up on this information that is interesting, and our conversation reveals some important insights.

REX: she [Cory] came out to me, [she said] ‘not only am I pan but I’m also trans’. For a while it really scared her because her dad was unsupportive, [and] I helped her out with that. A few months after meeting her and watching her transformation I was like ‘we might be more alike than I thought’. And...that was when I decided to look into whether or not I might be trans as well and it just so happens that there were some resources that I gathered in March, [and] I really began to identify as trans. Right now I am – I think that it’s called ‘dual role transvestitism’ and I don’t really remember what the specifics of it were but basically that’s what I was feeling.

KAILA: where did you hear that phrase?

REX: I was looking on the DSM 4 or 5 or whatever, website.

What was interesting in this moment, for me, were the resources Rex utilized in her identity exploration. In particular I thought it strange that Rex utilized the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* in her research – something geared towards service providers and situated within a medicalized framework (a topic I will pick up below). In the interview I asked her to explain what resources she had “gathered in March”, which it turns out she had received at the True Colors conference (the New England-wide workshop-based conference for GLBTQ and ally youth). Rex noted that she went to one of the trans workshops while at the conference. As an adult advisor at SMAK I had previously gone to True Colors, and from my experience I knew that youth could choose from a variety of workshops to attend. Without such experiential information, I might not have known that attending this workshop was her own choice, and I might not have pushed her to elucidate. But I did know, and so I pushed her further here, and include in brackets my own reactions to the material I had while transcribing the interview.

KAILA: ok, so why did you choose to go to that (workshop)? Cause there are all different workshops you can choose to go to and at that point you weren’t identifying as trans right?

REX: soon after that though [although according to her own timeline given in the first interview, that's not true as this conference was in March and she 'declared' her identity in November]...well it was really because of Cory, at that time she was just starting to transition and she was not dealing with it well, feeling confused, and I decided to go there to learn how to be a better friend to her [and I have the distinct feeling both during the interview and now transcribing, that she is completely making this up].

As my bracketed comments illustrate, I was not only questioning the information she was giving us, but indeed, I actively thought her to be 'lying'. When I came back to this transcript several years later when writing my dissertation I cringed at this section – as it seemed to me a harsh and mean reaction. My responses to her left a bad taste in my mouth, and as I continued reading through this interview transcript, as well as the debriefing Birdie and I conducted on the ride home after the interview, this feeling of repulsion to how I had reacted to Rex only grew. I include now an example of the kind of 'challenges' that I heard myself giving Rex in this interview. This was particularly apparent when the discussion turned to Rex's family life, and she seemed to tell a different story, saying that "my father only recently is becoming very supportive of it" and that, in fact, when she and her girlfriend broke up it was her father she turned to for support.

KAILA: well it seems like a very supportive environment, your stepmom offered us food, and your dad brought us a blanket – do you think other kids at SMAK have the same [support]?

REX: I think so, families eventually come around. I still haven't told my Grandma because she's strict Irish Catholic, but at my church I am completely out as everything.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, she again highlights the one person in her family that doesn't support her because she doesn't know about her identity. But more importantly, I draw the readers attention to the fact that here I was actively challenging her previous statements about the lack of support from her family (and I cringed to read this). Indeed, when writing this chapter and looking over all of our materials about Rex I recoiled

through most of it, as I saw all the places where I had bracketed the basic idea that I didn't believe her, and read Birdie and my's critique of Rex as an instance of failure. This was profoundly disturbing to me, as I saw myself as a 'bad ethnographer' challenging my informant – and it was also disappointing to my analytic process, as I began to view all of the data produced by said informant as untrue, and thus, useless. On the verge of scrapping all this material, I stepped away from the computer and sought the solace of Chris - one of the former SMAK youth who had become a close friend. What follows is an excerpt from my reflective 'fieldnotes' written that day.

ANALYSIS: So here I was, on February 18, 2009 – reading through a thick file of transcripts for the collaboration chapter – the first one on training and [the] HOW [of collaboration] and SMAK. I read through the analysis of Birdie's first interview with Rex, then our second one done together, then our co-analysis of the interviews, or more specifically, of Rex [herself]. And I keep thinking, as I code the interviews, that I'm being a bitch because there in front of me in black and white I saw all these times I challenged her (the therapy speak, the DSM talk, the science speak) how I literally say I don't believe her etc. And [so I take a break and] I go over to Chris's house to smoke a cigarette and say how bad I feel [that I basically had called Rex a liar] and she's like 'no, I never believed her either'. [Chris said] 'I never believed anything she said, it always sounded like she was reading right out of a book' – a script – 'a pamphlet?' I ask, [and] she's like 'yeah! exactly'. And so my first reaction I realized was that the interview was useless because I thought, it related to her pathology, her clear issues with needing to be accepted, I thought this 'data' is useless because I kinda know it's all BS.

And then I realize:

It's not useless data – I only had that reaction to Rex's 'picture (un)perfect' story because I knew her as an individual at the time and I knew the context. Like I thought in my analysis of her transcript, and like Chris noted, [and Birdie too]: She's just saying what people want to hear.

Right.

I KNEW that. But if [an outside researcher] had come in and not known that, not known her (context? pathology?) they might accept the story at face value. It was only [what I knew of Rex] prior to my research, my 'insiderness' that gave me the knowledge or belief that it wasn't 'true'. So there was an argument to doing the kind of research I had argued was important (relationship based, ethnographic, collaborative)! [Excerpt from fieldnotes]

So I began to feel better about what I had seen as my ‘bitchy’ and ‘bad’ analysis of Rex. Indeed, there was a reason why I felt distrust towards her, and questioned both her answers, and her motives, in the interviews. Suddenly I began to see that rather than being useless, the interviews with Rex actually presented an example of the kinds of different analysis we might produce when research is done with people who we know. In this instance, it took connecting with another youth who had known her at the time, to remember that I had some good reasons to question Rex in this regard, and indeed, that my questioning not only made a case for insider research as a method – but that actually, my questioning of Rex would ultimately be crucial for the analysis of why and how youth use services such as SMAK – but not in the way I had originally envisioned. In explanation, let me return now to the field, to Rex – and to what transpired after our second interview.

A Lesson in Conceptual Failure

The week following our second interview with Rex, Birdie conducted participant observation at SMAK and tape recorded the meeting, where Rex would ‘out’ herself in terms of family support. What is interesting in the following excerpt from this meeting is Rex’s use of ‘science speak’ – key terms that seem to denote a very ‘therapized’ experience – and what was to me a very odd way for a sixteen year old to be talking – not just in terms of the words she was using, but even the tone and inflection she used which sounded very ‘adult’ and also very medicalized. While much of the section illustrates this specialized way of talking, I’ve put in bold the phrasing that to me, capture her use of ‘science speak’.

REX: my brother has become more of a challenge of late than my father. My brother is rather overweight...he doesn’t like minorities and, even though he

knows that **statistically obesity is on the rise in the U.S.**, he's a minority in his school [because of his weight]. So we made a pact about minorities and not teasing each other for our own minority identities. **This was a major breakthrough.** And **my father has agreed to go to therapy with me to understand the gender issues and sexual orientation at play.** I'm not saying he's going to chaperone pride next year, but **I'm finally getting the support that I need.**

While it was surprising to me, Rex's use of clinical terms or 'therapy talk' is, indeed, not an aberration for youth involved in support organizations. Indeed, in her exploration of adolescent girls' body image, Frost conducted research with two sets of teen girls – one group culled from a local high school and another from an inpatient psychiatric facility. Not surprisingly, Frost found that “the youth women in the psychiatric facility offered versions of their body (and identity) which reflected medical and psychological fields of knowledge, in other words a ‘pathologized’ self,” (2003:125). In my research prospectus I had noted that similar findings regarding queer youth had been reported by researchers who found that their informants (re)produced aspects of the dominant discourses on their identities (Bohan & Russell, 2001). But as Frost explained, “this can be understood as more than simply a process of copying. The ideas have become personally ‘owned’ as part of the [youth's] belief system in relation to their subjective biographies” (2003:125).

Indeed, I had argued in my prospectus that for youth who are situated in mental health institutions (as in the case of Frosts' subjects) or are participants in public health programming, enrollment into particular conceptualizations of queer youth – and their attendant discourses – is a central part of the intervention process. Yet I had also taken a particular analytic stance in regards to the ‘reproduction’ of such discourses. In particular, I took issue with Russell, Bohan and Lilly's research on queer youth narratives which found that youth reproduce what they refer to as the ‘suffering suicidal’ script (2000:14) because “youth had heard so much of our concern for their well-being and our

conviction of their vulnerability that in many instances they had come to accept such expressions as depicting the inevitable reality for their lives¹⁵¹,” (2001, 3).

In contrast, I had argued that positing youth’s reproduction of prevailing narratives of risk or suffering as evidence of the prescriptive or ‘self fulfilling’ nature of dominant discourses reveals a problematic tendency to take youth narratives at ‘face value’ and assume that they present themselves as *they actually believe themselves to be* rather than presenting an image of themselves which they may have *strategically crafted*, “with a view to their possible circulation in wider...circuits of exchange, [for instance] in networks of voluntary and public-sector funding,” (Wade, 1999:454). I noted that this analytic omission is a tendency in research not only when ‘youth’ are the subject of concern, but indeed perhaps when any ‘othered’ population begins to ‘speak back’ to images of themselves. In my argument I drew from performance artist Coco Fusco’s idea that the “desire to look upon predictable forms of Otherness...[may be] powerful enough to allow audiences to dismiss the possibility of self-conscious irony in the Other’s self-presentation,” (1995:154). While Fusco located this tendency as an outgrowth of racist, colonialist and imperialist legacies which viewed the ‘other’ as not smart or savvy

¹⁵¹ Given that, “the stories that portray LBGT teens’ lives as hopelessly painful also reach LBGT youth,” (Russell & Bohan, A:11) Bohan & Russell shift the discourse of risk to one where, “the very real risk is that LBGT youths may conclude that these are the only legitimate stories for their own lives,” (Russell & Bohan, A:11). They also cite one youth who stated that she doesn’t feel like a real lesbian because she hasn’t attempted suicide (2001:1) and another youth who stated explicitly, “I feel like a loser because I never committed suicide, I never did drugs,” (A:11). They conclude elsewhere that, “our emphasis on such dangers may actually serve to increase rather than decrease the risks that youth face,” (2001:4). Prominent gay youth research Ritch Savin-Williams draws from these author’s ideas to push for the end to gay youth programming. As he contends, “targeting ‘gay youth’ generically for special programs might very well increase self-destructive behavior rather than promote wellness; it might encourage the very behavior we’re seeking to halt,” (2005:193).

enough to strategically utilize discourses or modes of representation in their own presentation (Fusco, 1995), I posited that such problematic ideas also underscore conceptualizations of adolescents who are framed as biologically, physically and mentally ‘undeveloped’.

In contrast, I had argued that we needed to think beyond a model which sees youth as passive ‘receivers’ of dominant discourses, to ones capable of articulating youth’s agentic interactions with these discourses. Through this new framework I contended that we may view queer youth’s use of ‘at risk’ discourses in their personal narratives as possible evidence of their awareness that it is the “trauma of young queer life that captures attention and qualifies as legitimate¹⁵²,” (Russell & Bohan, 2001:3), and view their use of this discourse as a potential strategic appropriation of dominant narratives through which youth may “make claims upon the state and its services,” (Urla, 1993:818). I argued that we must understand how queer youth interact with dominant discourses in multiple ways, to look at these discourses as not inherently oppressive but rather as producing both hegemonic and anti-hegemonic effects (Ginsburg, 1999) and as such bring attention to youth’s agency. Thus I envisioned my project as one concerned with how youth respond, rework, and resist these discourses as well as to the ways they may be agentially re-enacting or reproducing them. What I hadn’t envisioned – or rather, what I couldn’t have predicted at the time – was how my own analytic framework would blind me to the very things I was looking to find. I return now to the fieldnotes

¹⁵² Indeed, these authors note that, “some youth have told us that they have disqualified themselves from participation in queer youth panels because their personal coming out experiences were generally positive...[o]ther youth with similarly positive stories have related that, when they did join youth panels, their experiences took a back seat to audiences’ interest in the stories of teens who had indeed encountered far greater difficulties,” (2001:3).

written last week, in the wake of my ‘ethnographic crisis’ regarding Rex and my discussion with Chris.

So there was an argument to doing the kind of research I had argued was important (relationship based, ethnographic, collaborative)! And my argument [for that methodology] had been that indeed kids knew the official party line and utilized it strategically and agentively to get the resources they wanted to. And here [in Rex’s interview] was a brilliant example of that in action. Though I dismissed it at first because I wanted to get to the ‘real story’. And if we can ever get that – that’s another question – but the more pertinent thing was that here was an example of that [and I dismissed that].

But why had I dismissed it? Indeed, I had posited in my proposal that youth were well aware of what researchers wanted to hear – these dominant discourses of risk and suffering - and so I suggested that they might (re)produce that in their own narratives. And Rex had, in fact, done just that. So why was Rex’s narrative so troubling to me? In my reflective fieldnotes I explored this further, and came to see that perhaps I dismissed Rex’s story because while it was an example of the kinds of reproduction of dominant narratives that I had believed I would find, it didn’t exactly fit into my conceptualization of youth agency and strategic appropriation of discourse.

[Maybe] the reason why [I dismissed Rex’s story is because she showed that when] they use it strategically and agentively [it] wasn’t as romantic or maybe as conscious as I had wanted it to be. And indeed, maybe having it be a conscious strategy was what I had conceptualized it as, maybe that blinded me here [but also helped me now] to get clearer about how it happens (indeed, it might not be conscious in some cases – for other youth it seemed more conscious) but the underlying mechanism – the enrollment into and reproduction of certain narratives of queerness and risk and youth identities – WAS indeed evidenced in this interview. I came close to dismissing it because it wasn’t the romantic resistance I was looking for! [But] it was a clear reproduction – and in some ways I think it was conscious and used strategically to get what she wanted – which in this case maybe wasn’t a resource like SMAK (i.e. not just using it to make ‘claim on state and it’s services’ as I cited from Jackie Urla) but maybe it was a way for her to get a resource she wanted – a resource like myself and Birdie – personal relationships of acceptance and friendship she didn’t have (i.e. resources she lacked). Indeed – she tried to use the

interviewing thing as a ‘hook’ into friendship with Birdie (inviting her to go camping etc) which I know Birdie had issues with and felt bad about (it felt like we were ‘using’ her in some ways). [Excerpt from fieldnotes]

What I came to understand in this reflection was that in dismissing Rex’s narrative as untrue and ‘simply’ telling us what we wanted to hear, I was unwittingly committing an act of analytic self-sabotage. That disconnect should have fit perfectly into my conceptualization of youth narratives: indeed, my distrust of her story meant that I didn’t believe she was telling us stories of suffering because, as other researchers had (in my view) wrongly assumed, it was how she ‘really’ saw her life. Rather, this was an example of what I had thought I would find: strategic deployment of dominant discourses which illustrated youth agency. But I didn’t see it here, and the reasons why are very telling about the assumptions I had made about what shape the strategic deployment of dominant discourse would take.

Indeed, in questioning Rex’s narrative, I felt I wasn’t ‘granting’ her the kind of agency I believed youth used in strategically telling dominant narratives in order to garner the resources they lacked. But she was – in hindsight – very clearly ‘telling stories’ in order to stake a claim of authenticity in the SMAK group and to connect to other people and make friends. As I had thought, she told these stories because they helped her get what she wanted, they helped her make a claim for, and access to, the resources that she needed. So what was my (analytic) problem?

Here was the conscious deployment of discourses I had hoped to find. But maybe my analysis wasn’t built to take into account that in the cold light of day it didn’t seem all that agentic, it just seemed...desperate. Maybe it was exactly what I thought I would find, but when it was all said and done it wasn’t the romantic resistance I had envisioned,

it was just – scuzzy. It was transparent. And yes, another researcher coming from the outside might not have known that, but I did, and I was just...well, first I was blind to it and then I was just disappointed. Strategic deployment of risk discourse – it sounded like one thing in theory but it looked very different in practice. At first it just looked like dishonesty but when I realized what it was, that it was indeed a strategic deployment of the risk narratives – it wasn't the romantic and agentive thing I thought I would find. And while it did (eventually) fit into my argument about how youth may use narratives of suffering to make claims on services and access resources, it wasn't the 'whole story', as I soon came to find out.

For while my co-researcher had begun by interviewing this youth we didn't know all that well, I had begun my interviewing with a youth who I did know very well, a young woman named Chris, who had long been involved in SMAK, who had also taken my course at the community college, who would later collaborate with me on an article about *The New Gay Teenager*, and the one I would seek solace from in the wake of reading the Rex transcript some three years later. At the time of our interview we were already friends, and so I thought – as friends often do – that I knew 'her story'. What I would find out in the interview challenged not only my ideas about what I knew about her, but also challenged my understandings of the role of SMAK.

On the Limits of Support Groups: or, "SMAK is Gay"

Eighteen years old at the time of our interview, Chris had dropped out of high school a few years prior. In asking about her high school experience I asked if there was a particular incident that precipitated her dropping out. She said, "there were *lots* of incidents...Um, one teacher would hear kids calling me 'dyke' or like say things like they

were going to corner me in the hallway and teach me something...and he wouldn't do anything. He would just say 'quiet down, I'm trying to explain something', but he wouldn't call people [out] on threats and homophobic language." She continued on explaining her high school experience, and I include here some excerpts of that interview transcript directly, as my reaction to Chris's story is as important here as her story itself.

CHRIS: there were kids who would call me faggot during the class....I would never have a lab partner...

KAILA: Are you serious?

CHRIS: Yeah!

KAILA: This is like, I out of a textbook of like, 'I was gay youth!'

CHRIS: Yeah..[she cracks up]. Its so stereotypical gay youth...like, growing up in a rural area, like..hard-core..

K: Wow, it really is!

CHRIS: Yeah. And my...math teacher just told me to suck it up...

KAILA: When you actually went to him...or her...

CHRIS: Him...I never actually went to him, I just walked out of his class a couple of times. One day he told someone to be quiet, after [a student] had been sitting behind me, kicking my desk, saying 'dyke,' over and over, and I stood up and I said, 'This is fucked up!' And I walked out. [Chris laughs] And he followed me into the hallway, and he said, ' You know, you're gay you need to get used to it'. And I said, 'No, this is fucked up!' And I walked out of the school and went home.

KAILA: This is like an afterschool, made for tv movie clip! You're like, I was the role of 'queer kid.'

CHRIS: [laughs] It's like a total lifetime movie, that's what I'll give the name of my autobiography. [laughing]

KAILA: 'I was the role of queer kid.'

CHRIS: Mmhmm [affirmative]

KAILA: Like, it's *so*...I mean, its interesting because I don't remember...its funny cause, I guess...did I know you during this time?

CHRIS: Mmhmm [affirmative]

KAILA: At SMAK?

CHRIS: Mmhmm [affirmative]

KAILA: But, I never...you didn't talk about--

CHRIS: I didn't like talking about high school.

KAILA: Ok. So, here's this environment that's for support..

CHRIS: Mmhmm [affirmative]

KAILA: But it's like, and you were, you were going to SMAK every week, and you weren't talking about what was going on for you in high school.

CHRIS: Mmhmm [affirmative]

KAILA: Why?

CHRIS: Because... I talked to my guidance counselors a lot about it, and....I already kind of had a my mind set on what I was doing.

KAILA: Right...but were you talking...I don't remember you at SMAK talking even just about the environment of people calling you "fag" at school...you know, why...were you not talking about it more?

CHRIS: Because I thought that it was like, overkill, like, the more I talked about it, nothing was going to happen. Like, I still, I spoke to the principal about it a couple of times, I talked to the vice-principal about it a couple of times, I spoke to like—all of the good teachers that I had, all two of them...

KAILA: Right. So you didn't feel like talking about it at SMAK would be a help to you...

CHRIS: I didn't like focusing on it, very much....like, when I got out of school I didn't want to think about school.

Indeed, Chris echoed a common sentiment in our research, that many of the youth who utilized SMAK, who may have had the same stories of suffering and abuse that Rex emphasized as her ticket into the group, actually downplayed or actively omitted altogether these narratives of risk at our meetings. In contrast to Rex's eager sharing, other youth - sometimes even outside of the group - seemed to want to avoid discussing the 'common narratives' about their sexuality at all cost. This was especially evident in my interviews with Taylor, one of the few young gay males who had been a SMAK regular for many years. As with my interview with Chris, I was surprised to learn about the 'textbook' experiences of harassment Taylor had experienced in high school but had never, once, shared in group discussions at SMAK. Below are several excerpts from this interview.

KAILA: where'd you go to high school?

TAYLOR: Hilltown Valley Regional School, Class of 2005! [fake enthusiasm]

KAILA: How was that?

TAYLOR: It was stupid.

KAILA: It was stupid?

TAYLOR: I fucking hate high school.

KAILA: Was it? Why?

TAYLOR: I don't know. Being called fag every day just doesn't make you happy.

KAILA: Did you really [get called that]?

TAYLOR: Yeah.

KAILA: By who?

TAYLOR: Every single student.

KAILA: Did you have a GSA?

TAYLOR: Yeah but, people only went because it got them out of class. I only went because it got me out of class.

KAILA: Seriously?

TAYLOR: It was stupid.

KAILA: And tell me how you told your mom [that you were gay]. Where were you?

TAYLOR: She was in the bathroom peeing, and I just knocked on the door, and I was like, 'Hey mom?' And she was like, 'Yeah, I know...' And I was like, 'Ok...' [laughs]

KAILA: How did you know--how did she know that's what you were gonna say?

TAYLOR: She was probably waiting for it.

KAILA: She said, 'Yeah, I know?'

TAYLOR: Yeah

KAILA: And you went, 'OK.'

TAYLOR: Yeah

KAILA: So how did you know she didn't mean....

TAYLOR: It was the sound of her voice...Like the--I don't want to talk about it - this is stupid! [laughs]

KAILA: Wait! Well we don't have to talk about it anymore if you don't want to talk about it, but why is it stupid though?

TAYLOR: I don't know...coming out stories are soooo queer--

KAILA: [laughing]

TAYLOR: I watch them --I watch them on LOGO all the time, and they just piss me off....

KAILA: Ok so you watch them all on LOGO all the time, and they piss you off, why?

TAYLOR: Yeah...I don't know, because....[they're all] crying and emotional, and I'm just like...just fucking do it, ok, don't cry about it....

KAILA: So were you crying and emotional when you came out?

TAYLOR: No (laughs)

KAILA: Do you ever wish you had somebody to talk to about [your feelings]?

TAYLOR: No.

KAILA: So on one hand that's like why people say SMAK is good...

TAYLOR: Like talking to everyone...

KAILA: ...about your feelings...

TAYLOR: SMAK is gay.

KAILA: [cracks up] (pause) Did you ever talk to Birdie about [your feelings]?

TAYLOR: No.

KAILA: So what would you and Birdie talk about [at SMAK]?

TAYLOR: We just....hung out. Like, chilled. Hug each other a lot.

KAILA: Really?

TAYLOR: You've seen us when we hang out. We hug each other like, every five minutes. (pause) I love her.

KAILA: Aww. Does it ever feel lonely to not talk about your feelings?

TAYLOR: No, I mean....I have friends, like if I need to talk about anything, but like...I feel stupid talking [about] stuff to people, so I just...I'd rather have a good time with people than talk about how I feel.

As an adult advisor at SMAK I had noticed this as well, as our conversations at the weekly meetings ended up rarely being about sexuality or issues of sexual orientation. In reflecting upon this in our first collaborative training meeting Birdie and I discussed this issue, and my struggle in understanding the role of sexuality at SMAK. As I told her, “this is where I get really stuck. Cause [at SMAK] part of it for me is [understanding] well, how important is sexuality? Maybe what's important is that these people all came together at SMAK and that is conceptualized by policy makers as being a place for people who identify around sexuality. But how it was on the ground [seemed] very different. Like people didn't come to actually talk about sexuality most of the time, and I remember a lot of times [at SMAK] where there would be more people who identified as straight than who identified as gay in the room,” and she agreed, citing her own personal experience, as she said, “yeah, I know I continued at SMAK for years and it was never really about sexuality for me”. Indeed, several of the ‘main players’ at SMAK either did not identify as queer, identified as allies or put no label on their sexuality (a point to which I will shortly return). As our research would show there was certainly no shortage of youth who faced harassment in school for their sexual identities, and while some (like Chris) had their experiences of marginalization ignored by school authorities, others were

‘intervened upon’ by guidance counselors and caring teachers well versed in the risk statistics.

Together Birdie and I came to understand that often these youth came to SMAK not to talk about this marginalization, but indeed, to get respite from it. In this supportive and queer-positive space such youth often didn’t want to talk about how their sexuality marked them as different, rather they relished the opportunity to relieve themselves of the burden of risk which had come to define so many of their interactions at school, at home, or with community counselors. In this open and supportive context, during our ‘check ins’ they were more likely to want to process about an annoying sister, an obnoxious chemistry teacher, or a difficult boss as they were to want to talk about queer sexuality. So while SMAK existed on paper and in policy conceptualizations because queer youth were at risk, in grounded practice SMAK operated as the space where some queer youth could actually delink themselves from risk discourses, and instead work through all the other issues they struggled with. In this way, policy provided spaces for queer youth ‘at risk’ may actually provide the opportunity for youth to resist such conceptualizations. But, as Rex’s narrative illustrates, other youth did not resist the ‘troubled teen’ stories, but rather used them as a way to gain entrée into policy provided services and groups such as SMAK, or to tap into friendship networks. Indeed, for the many youth who came to SMAK – whether they identified as ‘queer’ or as ‘ally’, friendship and having ‘something to do in Hilltown on a Wednesday night’ was the primary draw. And in this way, one of the organizing aspects of SMAK was that it functioned as the ‘dinner table’ around which one could tell stories, or access the resources (like free internet, computers, and food) that so many of the youth lacked at home.

This created community, while not what policy makers envisioned, was incredibly important for SMAK participants. However, there were many other youth in Hilltown who never attended these community-based meetings. After coming to our analytic understandings of the different ways youth made use of SMAK, Birdie and I then began to explore those who were ‘non-participants’ in this group. And so we ‘split up’ and while Birdie began to conduct participant observation and interviews with the members of the Crew (or those who were referred to as the ‘street kids’ in Hilltown), I began my research at the Gay Straight Alliance at Hilltown Vocational High School, described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

MY FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL: AN INTRODUCTION TO HILLTOWN VOC

The Hilltown Vocational High School sits far out on the periphery of town. The Voc, as it is known in the community, isn't a place you could stumble upon - any visit there is deliberate and, if traveling on foot like many of its students, is a lengthy affair. If you were enjoying a cup of coffee at The Ave Café when the desire to journey to the Voc hit, you would turn off of Main Street, take a right down Oak Avenue and begin the long trek up a steeply ascending hill with no sidewalk, three hairpin turns, and two lanes of traffic whizzing past you at 40 miles an hour. Once you reached the top – winded – you would again continue down a busy road for nearly two miles. Finally, you would arrive at the Hilltown Industrial Complex – a long road housing two factories, a run-down office park, a landing strip for solo-flying airplanes, a cornfield, and finally, tucked at the very end of the cul-de-sac, the Voc - a single-story sprawling brick high school. The athletic field of the Voc was flanked by tall corn stalks on one side and a cardboard box-making factory on the other, an omen of the futures that awaited many of these youth after graduation as agricultural workers or factory employees. Indeed, I thought as I stood in the parking lot the day of my first visit, if the medium is the message - well, the message couldn't have been any clearer.

I entered the Voc for the first time unaccompanied, but with an appointment. I stopped in at the Front Desk, the first line of defense in high schools that have had to take increasing security measures since the school shooting publicity of the early 2000s. Unlike many of its urban counterparts the Voc didn't have metal detectors, which would

have been set off constantly by the hunting knives and Leathermen knock-offs¹⁵³ many of the students routinely carried with them. Indeed, as I would later find out, the administration worried more about youth getting injured by machines they themselves were operating in their vocational shops than with handguns or other weapons brought into the school. Still there was an uneasiness to the place, a sense of impending danger, instilled in the employees through years of reading large-font newspaper headlines about *High Schools Under Siege* and watching footage of traumatized students and teachers running away from school shooters. Though it was unclear to me at this point whether the threat was perceived as emanating more from outsiders to the Voc or from its own students, the fact remained that in this new high school battleground everyone was under suspicion. And so the Front Desk operated as a kind of border ‘check point’ where the anxious and apprehensive workers scrutinized every newcomer as a potentially hostile interloper, and thus required either official paperwork or sufficient name-dropping to allow access into this other world.

At the front desk (border-patrol) I explained to the secretary (guard) that I was legitimate visitor (intruder) with an appointment to speak to Crey, the English teacher who also served as the head of the Voc’s Gay-Straight Alliance, or simply the ‘GSA’. I was told to sign in on the official registry (watch-list), and was then handed a map of the building on which the secretary traced in pencil the path I should take to get from the Front Desk to Crey’s office – a gesture ostensibly meant to help me, it was also a thinly disguised effort to control my movement through the building. I looked over the map, expressing to Marcia (the secretary) my amazement at the size of the high school. Indeed

¹⁵³ Leathermen are multi-tool pocket knives (like Swiss Army Knives) but they are also expensive. Many of the kids carried these all purpose tools, but they were generic brand.

the complex was truly expansive, housing as it did over 500 students, 50 faculty members, 30 classrooms and 12 full-service ‘shops’ which operated 15 vocational specializations. *Marcia, this is like ten times the size of my high school* I exclaimed *can you please show me this route one more time so I don’t end up walking in circles?* She laughed, explaining that it looked more complicated than it was, and again traced her finger along the pencil line she had drawn. ‘Good luck!’ she called out with a smile as I walked away. By now Marcia was confident that I was harmless, just maybe bad with maps, which would buy me some time to explore. If anyone stopped me, I’d just hand over the map and pretend to be lost, and Marcia would chuckle, ‘yeah, that graduate student can’t find her way across a square room!’

I began down the hall towards Crey’s office and, as soon as I was out of sight of the front desk, took the first right I came to. Here was a long corridor with all the ‘normal’ material culture of the high school: the walls of brightly colored lockers, the closed doors to classrooms which muffled the sound of lecturing teachers, the vending machines, the teachers who smiled at me oddly – despite my backpack and jeans I didn’t quite pass for a teenager – and the stray student here or there who avoided making eye contact with me in case I was an authority figure set to request their hall pass. Yes, it was all too familiar, the stuff of Hollywood, as though I had just walked onto the set of ‘Yet Another Teenage Movie’. I turned another corner and there, amid the long hallway of lockers, I was transported back to my own high school. Suddenly I could remember the names and faces of my own middle-class suburban high school, the familiar routes walked over and over, the smells and even the slight nausea I remember being nearly constant. I swear, if I had closed my eyes and walked up to a random locker, I would

have remembered my combination. But then suddenly I was hit with an odor unrecognizable to me but powerful enough to knock me out of my nostalgic fog and into...*where?* I sniffed, *where am I?*

As I rounded another corner and came to a set of double doors I couldn't help but peer through the small glass window. But I didn't see the classroom I was expecting, no rows of desks filled with students slumped over and sleeping or passing notes. Instead here's what I saw: cars up on lifts, cars with the hoods open, cars with no doors or glass, sparks and a welding torch, something shooting flames, something else smoking, and mechanics bent over the engine with their hood lights, mechanic's legs sticking out from under the car, mechanic's hands and faces and t-shirts smeared with black oil. Only, like in some Hollywood movie without the budget to hire new extras, these 'mechanics' were the students from the previous scene. Yes Toto – I don't think we're in high school anymore. Only, we were – just not your average high school.

Building Blocks: The Structure and Curriculum of The High School

The 'average high school' figures prominently in our cultural imaginings – it is both a myth and an ideal, an educational and social curriculum that plays out within a specific physical structure. This physical structure – the actual material layout of the high school is familiar enough that most of us could create a mental sketch of what the 'average' high school looks like. In fact, this is what Herb Childress asks his readers to do in his ethnography of teen's use of space in rural California; he asks them to generate a list of the basic material culture that we think of as comprising the traditional high school. He lists all the commonly attributed artifacts - the lockers, classrooms, hallways -

that comprise the literal building blocks of our imagined high school. “This is all so innocent,” he says,

This is the inventory of the American High School, from Riverdale High in the Archie comics to Muskegon Catholic Central, where I graduated almost twenty-five years ago. It is, however, an inventory that tells us quite a bit about what we think a high school ought to be. That we take it utterly for granted tells us quite a bit about how powerful those beliefs are. (2000:214)

Childress contends that these beliefs about space, though rarely articulated, are crucial in structuring experiences. As he says, “the fact is that our physical construction of high schools reflects important but unspoken beliefs, and that both the beliefs and the construction make the ensuing experience almost inevitable,” (2000:214). Thus, when we encounter a high school that doesn’t fit into our cultural stereotypes, when the familiar high school spaces (the locker room, the class room, the guidance office) are set amid not more of the same but rather a host of ‘businesses’ that serve the community, then both the physical construction and the ideological structures that underlie them require our attention. Such is the case at the Voc, where part of the enrollment into a specific subjectivity – one that I argue is a specifically classed workers’ subjectivity – happens through the material culture and visual dimension of the school itself.

Structurally, Hilltown Vocational is indeed a strange place, as though the traditional high school building was cut into fragments and placed amidst it were a host of local businesses that serve the greater Hilltown community¹⁵⁴. So, when you meander

¹⁵⁴ And stylistically, Hilltown Voc is also different than our imaginings of the typical high school. This is not the school filled with plaid uniforms, Abercrombie shirts or FUBU jeans. No, here the standard dress is blue jeans, work boots and a well-worn tee shirt. While the ‘cosmo girls’ (as they were dismissingly or affectionately known, depending on the tone and context) might rock more stylish clothes, these are not the high school fashion plates presented to us on Gossip Girl or the new 90210.

the halls of this high school, you pass a row of lockers, and then come to a restaurant, an actual, working restaurant – complete with blue vinyl booths and elderly patrons - flanked not by other store fronts but rather by classrooms. Then you come across the Beauty Shop, a working salon – complete with big plastic pink curlers, aerosol hairspray, and white-haired customers. Next to it is not another business, but rather a mural of a downtown scene (actually a fairly accurate rendition of the main drag in Hilltown painted by some Voc seniors a few years back) against which a gaggle of students are sitting, their backpacks used as floor cushions, waiting for the ‘late bell’ to ring before scurrying off to their classes, or to work in the Autobody garage, where locals may get their car fixed for less than at Hilltown Auto. This ‘highschool/business’ split evidenced in the physical structure of the school serves to enroll students into a particular subjectivity, one that happens also through a similarly split curriculum.

Like the building itself, the program of study at Hilltown Voc straddles two seemingly disparate worlds – that of the high school and that of the working world. This is indeed, a defining characteristic of vocational education. In contrast to the ‘typical’ American high school, the vocational - or technical - high school utilizes a curriculum divided between traditional academics (math, english, science etc.) and vocational ‘shops’ (i.e. autobody, carpentry, welding, etc.). At Hilltown Voc this academic/vocational split is literally built into the school schedule, as students alternate weekly between the classroom and their vocational shops (i.e. if week one is spent entirely in academic classes, week two is spent entirely in the shop¹⁵⁵). As a student this

¹⁵⁵ The schedule is split by grade as well (i.e. during week one freshmen and seniors are in their shops while juniors and seniors are in the classroom, and the following week they

means that you've got to be on top of your schedule and very organized on a daily basis (for instance, knowing on any given day whether to leave your house with your backpack of books or your steel-toed boots). But most importantly, for those enrolled at the Vocational school, it means unpaid labor, and a lot of it.

Indeed, the Voc is not simply producing 'students' who must memorize facts, perform well on tests and write strong papers – nor is it simply producing 'workers' who must perform well at a technical skill. Rather, the voc produces what I call the 'student-worker' – one proficient in academics and a vocation, capable of splitting their time and effort effectively between the two, and able to prove their competency in both on state-mandated tests, while also successfully completing all state educational requirements. This is no easy task for the student-worker. For while Massachusetts has instituted basic course requirements for a high school diploma (i.e. four years of math, four years of language, three years of history etc.) the Voc students spend on average half the time in the classroom than their academic-only high school counterparts. Thus the Voc students' work-load is essentially doubled during the academic weeks. Given that these students are required to pass the mandatory statewide competency exam – the MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) - just like their academic-only counterparts, but with only half the preparation time, it comes as no surprise to learn that the number of Voc students falling outside the 'Proficiency' range and into the 'Needs Improvement' category is *double the state average*. Couple that with an equally rigorous shop component, replete with its own mandatory state-based testing - we've got a situation where over-worked and exhausted student-workers are playing a four-year long

switch) so that at any time both the academics and vocational shops are up and running at full capacity.

game of ‘catch up’ in a system that ignores the unique demands on their lives and where the stakes are incredibly high. Indeed the average Hilltown Voc student is essentially working a “double shift” throughout their high school career.

At one level, this was something the student-workers ‘chose’, as being part of the ‘choice track’ the Voc is a school to which you must apply for admission, not a place you simply ‘end up’. But on another level choice is a misleading term, as for many students the Voc presented a last chance for those who were failing or barely passing their academic classes in their ‘sending schools’¹⁵⁶, or those who simply knew they weren’t college bound, to gain skills that may give them an edge in the job market. For many of these kids who lack a financial and emotional safety net at home, the tech becomes their last chance to ‘make it’. In contrast to their middle-class and often suburban counterparts, who will often have four-years of college to figure out their futures and build skills for the job market, most of the Voc students know they have to figure out a way to survive financially immediately following graduation. Indeed, the Voc’s guidance counselor told me that the students are usually very aware of this fact – evidence, perhaps, of the awareness of their class position. As she explains, “one of the things we ask in the [admission] interview is why do you wanna come to the [Voc], what do think a voc school will do for you? [And many say] well, I’m not sure I want to go to college and I need some way to support myself when I get out of school.”

This is not the average experience for Massachusetts’ high schoolers, as evidenced in the following statistics about life after graduation for the class of 2007. While the majority (31%) of the state’s high school seniors planned on attending a four-

¹⁵⁶ ‘Sending school’ is the term used by Voc administrators to refer to the other schools from which students transfer to the Voc.

year private college *no member of the Hilltown Voc graduating class did*. While 27% of Massachusetts seniors planned on attending a four-year public college, only 7% of Hilltown seniors did. And while only 10% of the Commonwealth's seniors planned on going straight into the work force, 35% of Hilltown seniors did. In reality though, the majority of the Hilltown seniors had already been in the workforce for some time. Yes, many of the students worked jobs before or after school (some getting up with the sun to milk cows, others burning the midnight oil as 3rd shift gas station attendants). But in reality the students at the Voc *actually became part of the workforce when they enrolled at the tech* - as students spending half their 'school time' in their shop learning their trade and practicing it in the community, they are already 'at work'. This is, indeed, one of the key mechanisms for enrolling youth in this community into the 'working class' in general, and in particular, into the skilled labor set which constitutes an upper echelon of the working-class –offering possibilities for exploring the embodied experiences and reproduction of class fragmentation (Bourdieu, 1984; Krause, 1998).

Putting the Work in Working-Class: Vocational Education & Skilled Labor

“I do think that they all feel the stigma of being a voc-tech student, [but] I think most people in the building make an effort to tell them how special they are. I tell them all the time, no kid graduating from [Hilltown High] can do what you can, because they don't have the skills. You can go out tomorrow and get a job that's not gonna be outsourced to China, no matter how the rest of the world looks at you, you have skills.” (Ms. Sanders, Voc teacher)

While a central component of traditional secondary education is the socialization of youth into the role-based identity of ‘student’¹⁵⁷, many educational theorists and philosophers have contended that training youth for their future role as *workers* is, in reality, the ‘hidden curriculum’ of secondary education. As Herb Childress notes in his discussion of the high school, “let us be both clear and honest about this: the student is not the customer. The student is the product. The customer is the labor market,” (2000:236). But if the labor market is the customer, what must ultimately be produced is not a ‘student’ but a ‘worker’, and that production is a key part of the high school’s ‘hidden curriculum’. Yet, in the vocational school such a curriculum is neither hidden nor subsumed under the rhetoric of liberal education goals and philosophies. As Ms. Sanders above quote illustrates, in the vocational curriculum it’s not only the amorphous category of ‘knowledge’ that gets passed onto students - it’s real, concrete, *employable skills*. The emphasis on skills is constructed, and deployed, against three specters which haunt (to differing degrees and in different instances) the imagined futures of youth in this rural working-class community: 1) college, 2) the so-called ‘unskilled’ labor pool which I will refer to (more accurately) as the ‘service industry’ and 3) welfare.

In the first instance, vocational skills are presented as an alternative to the high cost of college. As the principal explained to me, “the great secret to vocational education is we can produce kids who are quickly making \$40-60,000 a year without a penny of college debt”. In fact the administrators are quick to point out that the mainstream ‘party line’ about post-secondary education – i.e. that you have to go to

¹⁵⁷ Interestingly as ‘student’ is not a permanent role, it mirrors ‘adolescence’ itself; conceptualized as a stage, a step on the ladder of development whose end goal is, in this case, the production of the ‘worker’ – the primary role-based identity for adults.

college to get a good job – is not only false, but is, in fact, propaganda. As one school administrator noted to me, “I mean, education is a business, I don’t think people realize that. They may put their hat on under a ‘non-profit’ but it’s a *BIG business*. So to perpetuate the myth that college is the only way to be successful, they’ve done a really good job...[but] you graduate with a liberal arts degree – you don’t have a lot of skills,”. Here the emphasis on employable skills sets these students apart from their college-bound counterparts who have the class privilege to spend four years in pursuit of a degree which, without further and more specialized training, may not qualify them for many jobs.

For the many Franklin County students who aren’t college-bound, the armed forces, or the workforce is their likely destination. Yet without training in a specific field, many will end up in the service industry. In today’s (so-called) global economy such jobs are increasingly unreliable because, as jobs assumed to require no outside training, they are either easily outsourced overseas, or stay local but are characterized by a high-rate of turn over as the employers can always find someone willing to work for less money and less benefits. As explained in Ms.Sanders opening quote, learning a trade, or becoming a *skilled* laborer offers some insulation from the problematics of the service sector and the outsourcing trend. And in addition to increasing the potential for reliable income, it also increases the potential for *higher* income. As the guidance counselor noted students, “can get out and [immediately] make more than any of their peers can from the sending schools”. Given that the American Community Survey of 2006 listed the ‘median earning for workers’ in Franklin County at roughly \$29,000 a year, I was skeptical when the principal quoted me the \$40,000-60,000 income rate for

graduating students who work in their trade. When I asked him about this he clarified, noting, “it doesn’t always jump off in that bracket but a high end student coming out of an electrical program could be picked up by Western Massachusetts Electric and *with some overtime*, their salary can pretty quickly jump to that level. And then if they’re hardworking and continue on to obtain their masters license...and then become an electrical contractor they can become very wealthy, and many of [our students] have,”. In this way, learning a trade becomes one of the few ways out of the ‘School to Service’ pipeline many rural and working-class youth in this area will be funneled through.

Yet a crucial part of the context regarding work opportunities is the changing economic climate of Hilltown in particular, and the larger (global) economy writ large. As noted in chapter one, the deindustrialization that swept the Northeast region in the 1990s hit Western Massachusetts particularly hard. Of course, as scholars have noted, this throws a wrench in our understandings of how class is reproduced. As Bettie, drawing from Weis (1990) explains, in a changing and deindustrializing economy, exact reproduction does not occur, indeed – it *cannot* occur. As she states, “with factory closings and other changes, their parents’ occupations are not available, and newer service sector jobs carry different meanings” (2004:197). Thus, scholars have turned their attention to interrogating the meanings and issues produced in working-class communities when the work leaves (see Weis 1990, Aronowitz 2001, Aronowitz & Cultler, 1998).

What’s important to understand in this context however, is that the vocational school offers some important protection in this changing economic climate. Indeed, the vocational school avoids the type of job disappearance characteristic of the

outsourced/global economy because of the *skilled* and *localized* labor it produces. So for instance, even if Western Mass Electric Company outsources some of its divisions (i.e. a customer service call center), they must still retain local skilled laborers able to install, trouble-shoot, fix, upgrade or disconnect the electric system at homes located in Hilltown. Thus it's precisely the 'hands on'/manual aspect of this skilled labor that protects it – indeed, it must be local hands providing this service. Thus, even as other local jobs go overseas, even as the defunct factories are bought up by young New York City transplants and turned into independent film production studios or shared artists space – these vocation-based jobs remain.

Because that's the thing with vocational services – even in a 'global economy', the needs for (at least many of) the vocations persist; you still need an electrician, you still need a plumber, you still need a HVAC guy to fix the heating or cooling system, you still need (perhaps in a rural area with a dearth of public transportation you *really* need) the automotive mechanic to fix your car so you can get to school or to your job, you can't outsource your hair across seas (Cosmo), and sometimes even in a bad economy, you still eat out (Culinary). And in Hilltown the wealthier folks who come in and buy up all the cheap houses still need carpenters to fix them up and landscapers to make the lawn pretty. And in an area where most every parent of a young child must also work outside of the home, there is still a need for trained childcare givers.

All told then, almost all of the technical specialties offered at the Voc are still relevant and thus, even in – perhaps *especially in* - the face of deindustrialization and outsourcing, Vocational education is a smart choice. A choice which also protects student-workers from the third common future for youth in this area: welfare. A loaded

term, “welfare” denotes a future that is both financially difficult, but perhaps more importantly, one that is ideologically burdened with an ‘excess significance’ (Rubin, 1994). Indeed, the specter of welfare is a powerfully organizing force in class divisions, one I watched play out in surprising ways at the Voc.

Putting the Working-Class to Work In Creating Class Divisions

At the level of theory and pedagogy, the emphasis on skill-based training serves to distinguish vocational from ‘traditional’ education, but for the student population it becomes the marker of difference between the working-class and the middle-class. Students are often acutely aware of this division, even if they do not always identify or articulate it as class-based. Ms. Sanders, one of the Voc’s social studies teachers, commented on the students’ awareness of distinctions between themselves and the students down the road at Deerfield Academy – one of the most elite private boarding schools in the country, home to the sons and daughters of royalty. As she noted, “[the students] do make some references to Deerfield Academy. [They say] ‘those Deerfield kids, they’re really...*different*. They’re different than us’. [And I say] yeah, they’re really different but they’re not smarter. They’re in a class of 12, they’re paying \$40,000 a year to go there, they get picked up in a limo sometimes on the weekend, but they’re not smarter than you.”

Yet in addition to highlighting differences across class lines that are more obviously seen or felt – like the distinctions between the working-class student at the Voc high school versus the student at the elite private academy – the vocational educational system creates other class divisions. Perhaps most crucially, vocational programs serve to distinguish differences *within* the working-class population. In particular, having a

skill-based vocational education becomes something which sets these students apart from their working-class peers who are also not college-bound, who also lack class privilege, but who – because of their lack of employable skills – are conceptualized by policy makers as likely to end up unemployed and on welfare. In contrast, as student-workers these youth are enrolled in a system where their ‘value’ is based on their potential contribution to the labor market. This was made explicit during a conversation with Ms.Sanders when she said to me, “I’d like to see the legislature realize that these kids are really valuable, that it’s not just the 128-495 [the two major traffic arteries that denote Boston proper and Greater & Suburban Boston] that’s gonna save the Commonwealth. These kids are really important. *These jobs are gonna be here, these kids are gonna fill them, and they’re really valuable members of the community*”. So in contrast to the traditional student who is seen as a resource-absorbing economic expenditure, at the Voc these student-workers are viewed as contributors to the system – as economic *producers*, as themselves an economic resource - precisely because of the skills they have learned.

At the Voc the students’ potential economic and social value is made explicit, their futures as workers fairly well solidified, and their contribution to ‘the system’ as skilled laborers serving to appease the state by keeping them off of welfare. Their status as skilled laborers also enforces a division within the working-class between the *working* working-class and those members of the working-class who are out of work and dependent on state assistance. The notion of ‘work’, then, becomes a key marker of the distinctions that exist within class fractions (Krause, 1998). This division was reproduced in my interview with Tiffany, a young mother and Voc senior, who told me,

the state pays for my child to go to daycare while I'm in school...me and my fiancée just got housing [and] I get WIC¹⁵⁸ - those are the only things I get from the state. *I will not go on welfare because I am fully capable of working and I know it. I want to earn my money the right way instead of living off of the state.*

While Tiffany accepted state assistance for housing, food and childcare, and could thus be considered as 'living off of the state' by some, in her mind there was a clear difference between these assistance programs and "Welfare" – and that difference mainly had to do with the issue of *work*.

For Tiffany there was nothing 'wrong' with accepting additional help from the state for bills that had to be paid, but going on welfare meant you weren't *working*, and while she and her fiancée might need some help to make ends meet, they both worked (in addition to Tiffany being in school). In their minds their status as workers meant they were not the 'lazy' members of the working-class 'content' to just 'live off the state' – rather, they were hard workers who had fallen on hard times, and they enrolled in state services to help them out. More than a linguistic difference between 'welfare' and 'assistance' then, this is an ideological distinction regarding work, ability and morals (i.e. 'I want to earn my money the *right* way') that allowed Tiffany to refuse welfare and to note proudly in regards to state assistance, "that's as far as I'll go – just WIC and housing and [childcare] voucher". For me, Tiffany's discussion about work, welfare and class represented a true "hegemonic moment if we understand hegemony to be domination through consent, for in this instance it is the subaltern subject herself who is articulating the ideology of the dominant class," (Krause, 1998:35).

¹⁵⁸ WIC is a state-based program which stands for (and provides services and goods to) 'Women Infants and Children'.

Central to this ideology is what some scholars have discussed as the “dichotomous imaginary” of the working-class, one comprised of, “the good poor, who are industrious and know their place, rendered in such archetypes as the honest factory hand,” (Haylett, 2000:8) versus the, “bad poor, who make childish, dangerous and unrealistic demands,” (ibid.). These ‘bad poor’ are also, at times, referred to as the ‘underclass’, which as Haylett notes, “is generally held to refer to social groups at the base of the working class whose characteristics are those of long-term unemployment or highly irregular employment,” (2000:70). But the issue is not simply one of employed versus underemployed, which is to say, it is not simply an issue about *work* - it is also crucially about gender. What I now turn my attention to is the particular context of deindustrialization and its effects on the gendered division of labor writ large, and in particular, for the vocational specialities at the Voc. Indeed, of particular interest to me during my time at the Voc was how this effected the student-workers’ expressions of gender and sexuality, as these identities are ones about which working-class and rural communities are stereotypically seen as having very ‘traditional’ (read: sexist and homophobic) views.

Class, Gender and the Division of Labo(u)r¹⁵⁹

Rigid concepts of masculinity and femininity can be seen to be associated with working-class people, who are then constituted as lacking the ‘knowledge’ about more up-to-date understandings of gender...the (gendered) behavior of working-class people can all too easily be characterized as retrogressive, pre-feminist, repressive, while the (gendered) behavior of middle-class people can be characterized as either

¹⁵⁹ I use the ‘u’ here as a nod to the fact that much, if not most, of the serious scholarship on class, class identities and class subjectivities comes out of the United Kingdom (see for instance, Munt, 2000).

not gendered at all or gendered in a more acceptable, liberating way.
[Lawler, 2000:124]

Why is it that the working-class is imagined to be more attached to traditional gender roles? Perhaps it is because, as Lawler continues, “[i]n some, at least, middle-class milieux, certain forms of (individualized) gender freedom are marked as ‘progressive’, against a ‘retrogressive’ view of the sexes belonging in different spheres, of there being distinct men’s and women’s roles and so on,” (2000:124) – an idea that’s often grounded in the gendered division of labor. Indeed, when we talk about a gendered division of labor within a capitalist economy we tend to talk about the division on two levels. The first level is the division of physical spaces into distinct, and distinctly gendered, ‘spheres’ – where traditionally the home is the (private) sphere of the feminine and the outside working world is the public and masculine sphere.

It is important to note, however, that scholars (such as Rose 1991) contend that this division of spheres has never been true for the working-class. First, the working-class are not generally afforded the ‘privacy’ invoked by the middle-class to shield the practices of the home from public scrutiny (as, for instance, Rose (1991) argues that the working-class has long been subject to invasion, surveillance and policing). Second, the working-class who generally depend on a dual income, a physical division between the home as the woman’s world and the workplace as the sphere of the man is incorrect, as both individuals must generally work outside the home.

The second layer on which the gendered division of labor plays out is through certain jobs, or entire occupational classes, being culturally coded as ‘male’ or ‘female’. Yet in the aftermath of deindustrialization, such coding has undergone a dramatic revision,

raising implications for not only individual workers, but also the economic and gender systems writ large.

Indeed, deindustrialization is conceptualized in much scholarship as intricately connected to, and having great effects upon, ‘traditional’ gender systems, particularly in relation to the working-class. Why? Because after deindustrialization, according to Kenway and Kraack, the new “global work order consists of a small labor elite...and an increasing number of people in casual, poorly paid and insecure work,” (2004:98) which is described as ‘feminized work’. As the authors explain, “The term *feminization of work* commonly refers to the trend for an increasing number of workplaces to emulate the work and working conditions that have historically pertained to the ‘female’ retail and service sectors,” (2004:98). So, whereas prior the masculine manual-laboring body was the embodiment of industrialization, the postindustrial labor market is personified through the feminine service-oriented body.¹⁶⁰ This is conceptualized in much scholarship as a threat to ‘working-class masculinities’, which, as Lawler’s quote illustrates, are overwhelmingly described as being (over)invested in ‘traditional’ (read: ‘rigid’) gender systems (a point to which I will return in the conclusion).

Scholarship on gender and deindustrialization is characterized by three common approaches. The first approach explores the shift from manual labor to a service industry as one that problematizes the very existence of traditional class categories. As Bettie notes, “[g]iven the historic meanings of the category ‘working class,’ as predominantly

¹⁶⁰ And in this context, it is not just laboring bodies but *entire classes* which ‘take on’ a gender. As Munt notes, “[w]ith the destruction of Britain’s industrial economy the *working-classes have become feminized* and, like the female body, working-class people have come to be discursively associated with ‘waste’, typified by the profligate spender and the feminized couch-potato,” (2000:8, my emphasis).

masculine manual labor, postindustrialism does make a U.S. working class hard to locate, especially when so many women fill the ranks¹⁶¹,” (3003:83). A second approach explores how the working-classes’ gender system is challenged during desindustrialization, and sometimes cemented in the process. Paul Willis is an exemplar of this approach that conceptualizes deindustrialization as (or at least having the potential to be read as) a process of demasculinization – and is experienced in some ways as a threat to ‘working-class’ masculinities. And indeed, it is important to note that this is central to Willis’s legacy, for ever since Willis’s lads got working-class jobs, the study of class reproduction and gender socialization has gone hand in hand¹⁶². Finally there is an approach which explores how desindustrialization can produce gender transgressive possibilities as, “[i]n this context, the persistence of the distinction between so-called ‘men’s and women’s work’ is now open to question along with the whole social

¹⁶¹ Indeed, part of what Bettie is referring to here is the historic invisibility of women as classed subjects. As she notes, “[w]hile the shift from industrial to service work (where the latter is often coded feminine and middle-class) poses a general challenge to the (re)creation of a U.S. working-class identity and to the anachronistic language of class itself, this begs the questions of whether the kind of sex-segregated, often service-oriented, labor that women have historically performed has ever been perceived as working-class.” (Bettie, 198). While a thorough review of her points is beyond the scope of this section, it is worth noting that in scholarship, there is a long tradition of studying working-class masculinities – and even with a feminist critique – it is still to the working-class male that we turn our attention. Indeed, Julie Bettie’s excellent book *Women Without Class: Girls, Race, and Identity* (2003) still stands alone as an exploration of working-class women. As she argues, “Women make the stage as class subjects, it seems, when they represent consumption and leisure, not work” (2003:34).

¹⁶² Yet, as Arnot notes, “Willis argues that the interconnections he uncovered between gender and class were specific to particular positionings of youth,” (2004:27). Indeed, Willis himself specifies, “I wasn’t arguing that a certain working class male masculinity was forever linking manualism and masculinity, but that these were different binary systems with their own histories, and that in other situations, you might have different articulations of gender, patriarchal and capitalist categories, there is a real instability in the way that gender systems and capital systems or capital relations are articulated with each other,” (quoted in Arnot, 2004:28). Though, critically, the context of the situation – which Willis viewed as crucial – tends to drop out in reproductions of his approach.

construction of gender,” (Cohen & Ainley cited in Walkerdine et al, 2000:9). And it’s with this third line of inquiry that I approach the gendered division of labor seen at the Voc.

For while traditionally vocational labor is coded as ‘masculine’, in reality, in this rural and working-class context, both males and females enroll in vocations. And according to the Massachusetts’ Department of Education Access to Equal Educational Opportunity (603 CMR 26.00), high school personnel are required to present a wide range of career opportunities to students and, “shall not present race, color, sex, religion, national origin or sexual orientation as limiting factors in career determination,” (26.04). Of course, even in the vocational high school, certain vocations are seen as more traditionally ‘male’ (i.e. automotive technology) and some as more traditionally ‘female’ (i.e. cosmetology). This is not simply a question of popular belief. In regards to the tech school, vocational specializations are *literally coded as a specific gender at the federal level*.

Through the 1998 Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Act (“Perkins III”) students are encouraged to enroll in shops that are ‘nontraditional’¹⁶³ for their gender (‘nontrad’ shops). As the DOE notes, Perkins III marked a major change in “the way programs are funded and administered for students in pursuit of careers that are nontraditional for their gender,”. Namely, all schools that receive Perkins III funding, “must measure and report on student participation in and completion of programs leading to nontraditional training and employment”. Note that while this is ostensibly designed

¹⁶³ Nontrad careers are those “for which individuals from one gender comprise less than 25% of the individuals employed in each such occupation or field of work,” (Department of Education, A).

to protect and support the student, the reality is that the federal government is mandating tracking and surveillance of these students – because they have chosen a gender non-trad shop. In other words, by (self) selecting such a shop, the student is automatically enrolled into a program of heightened surveillance. Indeed, every Perkins III school is supposed to have a ‘gender coordinator’ who serves as a point person for gender non-trad shop students. But as the guidance counselor explained to me, “we used to do that, we used to meet with the girls in nontrad shop, it’s usually girls, every once in a while you get a boy in cosmo or office tech...but they [the non-trad students] didn’t like it, they didn’t feel like they should get pulled out and pulled aside and talked about. And I can’t blame them”. But for the school this tracking is necessary because Perkins III established quotas. Indeed, this act identifies a goal of having 9.13% for nontrad enrollment, with 8.05% successfully completing the programs. As the DOE notes, to meet this quota and “to achieve this goal, students must learn and work in an environment where individuals consider career options and make vocational technical education choices based on their interests, abilities and talents and not on gender role stereotypes and expectations.”

In other words, despite a culture with a gendered division of labor, such realities are not supposed to impact teachers encouragement of selection, or students own selection. Indeed, in reality, having a funding-dependant quota may in fact create a situation where administrators do the opposite – actually encourage folks to do nontrad, in order to meet the quota. And actually, since many technical jobs in the ‘real world’ also have similar quotas, many teachers/counselors encourage this nontrad route as it will almost automatically translate into a higher income. Indeed, the guidance counselor echoed this, noting, “We really encourage nontraditional stuff because 1) they should get

to choose what their interests are and 2) unfortunately, the reality is that females in “nontrad” fields make more, and interestingly enough the converse is true for males and females. I made my living for 18 years doing hair ...[and] the men in that industry make far more than the women do, and they’re not all gay. There’s some straight men scooping up the dough”. Indeed, this higher earning potential is explicitly stated in the explanation of the benefits of Perkins III which, as they note, “open the door to a future in high skill, high wage jobs in growth industries where nontraditional by gender employees earn higher salaries, and better benefits, and experience broader opportunities for advancement than those in traditional occupations” (DOE, A).

So at the Voc there is considerable, accepted, and because of the potential for increased income generation even *encouraged* deviance from traditional gender occupations. This may mean that there is also a concomitant encouragement of deviance from traditional gender roles – or this might mean that the opposite occurs – and gender role adherence becomes all the more important when gender occupation deviance is allowed. Indeed, when young men and women work together on fixing an alternator, or take turns nailing down roof tiles, a ‘traditional’ gendered division of labor is simply not applicable, and this may either raise gender-transgressive possibilities – or an increased policing of gendered norms (a point to which I will return in the conclusion). Nevertheless, the school administration believed it produced the former – and that this was evidence of how ‘forward thinking’ the Voc – and its working-class student population – really was. As the principal of the Voc noted to me once,

“I think the myth of the tech school, and maybe one I still carry to some extent – is it’s a blue collar crowd, one that we’re [quick] to see in a biased way as having more stereotypical views than a white collar crowd of kids – the kids that are the sons and daughters of the lawyers and

doctors, that attend the schools that *don't* send those kids to us, but I think we're probably further along in this continuum than many of them are, that's the wonderful sublime thing about this place."

Such transgressive possibilities – the ‘wonderful sublime thing’ - was indeed what brought me to the Voc - as it had one of the oldest Gay-Straight Alliances (or GSAs) in the County, the Voc seemed to be the most safe and welcoming of all the schools in the area. Likewise, this may be what brought some of the Voc students to the school as well. Indeed, as a ‘choice track’ school the Voc attracted students for a variety of reasons. Of course, some came because they had a passion or talent for a particular vocational specialty, yet others came for reasons that were not always so transparent. As a school administrator explained to me, “a lot of kids come to us because they’re trying to get out of their sending school – they’re not motivated always by the vocational piece of it, their motivated by getting the hell out of dodge.” Indeed, this was the case for a number of Voc students whose gender expression or sexuality had put them under fire at their sending school. For these – and other students – the Voc was overwhelmingly conceptualized, and largely experienced, as a ‘safe space’.

Sexuality & Safety

“I had a senior that came to us from Hilltown High as an 11th grader and it was an emergency situation because he was getting so harassed where he was he was on the verge of taking his own life. And [he] came here and developed a comfort – I mean, he came in *drag* one day – and there were some kids that were like [makes a face] but for the most part, except for a couple remarks, they were like ‘oh, that’s just Mark’. That couldn’t happen at Hilltown North or Hilltown South or Franklin High.” – Ms. Sanders

Over and over during my time at the Voc all the adults who interacted with the students - the administration, the teachers, the GSA leaders – commented constantly on

how safe and welcoming the environment at the Voc was for GLBTQ students. Indeed, it seemed like everyone wanted to tell me how good it was here; how they had the oldest GSA in Franklin County, how the duo voted ‘Class Couple’ a few years back was actually a female-to-male transgender boy and his girlfriend, how masculine-identified girls were ‘allowed’ to wear the boys-color robes during graduation. And indeed, when I came to the school to sit in on the well attended GSA meetings, and watched the GSA president saunter down the hall and receive high fives or pats on the back from nearly everyone she passed, it was easy for me to think this too. And this was a major – I mean, *a major* – shock, because for years I had served on the Gay and Lesbian Youth division of the Council of Massachusetts’ Adolescents (COMA) and heard the tales of high school horror. For years I had worked at SMAK and watched kids drop out of the other local high schools because of homophobia and harassment. While I had seen a few of these youth find some relief at the Voc, I had a hard time understanding why the Voc seemed to be the only local high school that was a true ‘safe space’ – and through my conversations with the administrators I came to see that they did too. But the question was *why*?

Indeed, I asked this question when Ms.Sanders made the above statement – why could this kind of accepting reaction to a queer male student in drag that could not happen in any of the other local high schools happen at the Voc? Her response – ‘I don’t know’. It was the same one given initially by the social studies teacher, the GSA advisor and the principal when asked why the Voc was such a ‘safe space’. But during the course of our conversations over the next few months, students and staff would explore this issue more, talking through the possible reasoning behind it and offering some

explanations. At times they would conclude that it had everything to do with supportive adults youth could lean on, as one shop teacher told me, “I think on a one-on-one basis almost every kid has someone in the building that they can talk to”. Other times they credited the GSA itself, as did many of the students, as I heard several seniors proclaim during the final meeting of their high school careers, “the GSA saved my life”. And in particular, they credited the presentation the GSA made to the incoming freshmen every year, as one of the GSA advisors told me, “basically we inform the freshmen what the climate is that they’re walking into and we let them know that this is the environment they have to maintain”. Eventually, they credited the kids themselves, noting the importance of peer relations in setting the ‘standard’ of the school, as the Principal noted, “the GSA kids – in that group of kids are the most popular kids in the building and it just sets a standard. Kids learn from kids. And us putting those kids out there doing this type of work is a whole lot more effective than adults talking to a group of kids”.

Among those ‘most popular kids in the building’ was Mack, a senior who served as president of the GSA. I first met Mack several years ago when she was one of the younger, but also one of the most active, participants at SMAK. Indeed, it was Mack who introduced me to the Voc, letting me ride her coattails through the halls of the school, granting me a stamp of approval, or a ‘cool by proxy’. Indeed, I gained entrée to the youth community in this school largely just by being seen with her. In addition to giving me this incredible access within the school, Mack would also spend a lot of time with me in thoughtful conversation on the streets of Hilltown and in her densely decorated bedroom at home. She would become a ‘major player’ in my research, someone who always gave me incredible insight into her own life and life in general, and

someone who would make me laugh so hard so often that I learned to carefully time the sips of my drink whenever we were hanging out. Mack's complex and fascinating and funny and heartbreaking story is at the center and soul of this work. But here, in terms of the high school, what's important to know about Mack is that everyone felt this way about her - she had a commanding presence, a huge personality and an even bigger fanclub. She was also very openly gay, very 'out', and had an intensely masculine gender presentation. In many ways, she ran the school.

As I would learn during my time, Mack was the 'how' of this safe space – she was the one who would often 'handle' any issues of name-calling in the hallway. As such, Mack was the single most important person for the GSA, and they knew it. She would be their most public face, speaking at all the local youth conferences on their behalf, and one time even showing up on my TV as I was flipping channels (I had unknowingly hit upon a news story about a Teen Action conference). So it's no surprise that when it came time for that all-important ninth grade presentation, Mack would be the star of the show.

Scared Straight(s): The Gay Straight Alliance Assembly

Mack took the center of the stage at the GSA's presentation to the ninth grade, which was actually the floor in front of the stage, and addressed the crowd in her easy Southern-style drawl. Though Mack had never lived outside of Franklin County she was an excellent impersonator, and depending on who she had spoken to or what music she had listened to that day, she could pass as a drill sergeant (or in her accent, a *sar'ent*) from Alabama, a rapper from Crenshaw, or a kid from el Barrio. Today, she channeled a slight down-home Americana twang, and as she spoke she slowly paced back and forth in

front of the rows of folding chairs filled with nervous freshmen. Her movement was subtle at first and so it wasn't till she paused at a moment for dramatic effect and I saw every head come to a sudden stop that I realized she had every eye in the room locked on her, following her almost unconsciously, in a sort of trance. "My name's Mack," she began, "I'm the president of the GSA, been the president for 4 years. I take my job very seriously, I try to support everyone. [pause] Who here knows who Matthew Shepard is?" In the room of just over 40 freshmen, no one, *not a single person raised their hands*. I remember being floored by this. Mack was too. "Ok," she paused, and then, "...wow. This just gets harder every year." Yes, this wasn't the first time Mack had done this presentation, and told the following story about Matthew Shepard, a martyr of the modern gay movement. While only nine years old at the time of his death, Mack was well versed in his story, and her telling was well rehearsed.

He was 20 years old and he was in Wyoming – great place – and he was hanging out, having a few drinks. This kid was openly gay, known around as gay. He wasn't like flaunting it and wearing big rainbow flags or whatever, marching around, parading himself - he was just sitting there having a few drinks when a couple of guys approached him, *hey, how ya doin'?* They got to talking and they were like *hey we're gay too, it's really cool to find gay people around here*, so Matt automatically felt there was a connection. To be out in Wyoming is almost crazy like...to identify as gay in such a place. So they're all hanging out and these two guys were like *wanna go for a ride?* and he was like sure, you know, whatever. And they went for a ride and they started driving out to a secluded area and they told Matt to get out of the truck. They pull out a gun and they start hitting him with the gun, beating him up. And, they...they tie him to a fence, in a scarecrow position – which is sitting down, he has his arms out like this tied to a fence. They pistol whipped him. And...left him there, bleeding everywhere. Oh yeah, he was naked. Three days later Matthew Sheppard died.

There's total silence in the room, and Mack just lets it hang there for a minute. Then she continues, pacing once again across the floor, completely in control of that room.

These people didn't even know Matthew Sheppard. The only thing they knew about him was that he was gay, and they didn't like it. So, Matthew Sheppard had a funeral. And at his funeral people surrounded his funeral with signs that said 'Matt Burn In Hell' and they would tell his parents that he was going to hell cause he was gay. Now, picture someone that you love passing away and people protesting at their funeral, telling you that that person you love is going to hell. His friends and family had to put on big angel wings, and they surrounded the casket, and his body and his family so they could say their final goodbyes to him in peace. I just want you to think about that.

Unlike many fourteen-year-olds in America, those who are said to have that mythic 'invincibility complex' and to be sheltered from the reality of mortality, a lot of the incoming freshmen at the Voc had already come face to face with death, had already lost someone close to them.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, just two years prior the Voc community had lost one of its most popular students – and Mack's best friend – in a motorcycle accident. So appealing to the students' sense of injustice and sadness about their friends' accidental death, and asking them to imagine the additional tragedy of having protesters at his funeral was a smart strategy.

It's also a strategy commonly used when this story is presented to heterosexual audiences – attuning their focus not on the 'gay' aspect of Matthew Shepard but rather on his 'everydayness' - Matthew as a student trying to make friends and make it through a tough life, just like all of 'us'. The tragedies of his torture and death are not compounded by the protesters at his funeral, rather they are eclipsed by it. In the same way that a Councilor on the Gay and Lesbian Youth Division of the Council on Massachusetts' Adolescents (COMA) once noted that the emphasis on gay youth at risk was a successful policy strategy because "no one could be *for* youth suicide", so too in this story it is

¹⁶⁴ As I will explore in the conclusion, the 'invincibility complex' is a class-based phenomenon, not simply an age-based one.

unthinkable that anyone could be ‘for’ what happened to Matthew. The fact that people were ‘for’ it actually becomes very important, and when told to heterosexual audiences, is the most ‘useful’ part of the story. For while audiences may ‘explain away’ the atrocities committed by his murderers as the actions of one or two ‘sick’ individuals where the problem must surely lie in their individual pathology, throngs of protestors waving signs that said “God Kills Faggots” and “Matthew Burn In Hell” in front of his mourning family and friends as he is laid to rest – well that is not so easily explained away as individual psychology.

Indeed, I would argue that it is the *protest* – not the death – that is the real crux of the story, as audiences must account for the larger cultural norms and values (or lack thereof) that would allow for such a public violation of norms of sympathy.¹⁶⁵ This mode of storytelling is along the lines of what I call ‘Matthew Shepard Died For Your Sins’ – a narrative meant to invoke in heterosexual audiences both sadness at humanity and also enough guilt and shame to ‘step up’ the next time they hear people using the word ‘faggot’. While it may seem like a large jump from name calling to torture and murder, it’s nonetheless generally a successful narrative. And it worked here, in this high school assembly, too – the students sitting shocked or saddened into silence for several minutes before Mack continued.

I want to tell you a little bit about my middle school life...I went to Hilltown Middle School. I used to get spit on all the time and called a faggot. And our bus driver just sat on his butt, listening to Bear Country [radio] and I had a friend and she’s here today – her name’s Maggie.¹⁶⁶ I

¹⁶⁵ In addition to the commonly told narrative, other works such as *The Laramie Project* follow a similar route – holding up a mirror which shows each of us (as individuals and collectively as society) as ‘to blame’ for these crimes as we tolerate hate, dismiss name calling, and allow bullying and violence (physical or emotional) to go unpunished.

¹⁶⁶ A pseudonym.

would sit next to this girl everyday on the bus and she helped those [kids] stop harassing me and I just want to bring her up here for a minute – this is one of my best friends I can honestly say. She knows what it's like growing up in high school, being an out teenager – and I want her to talk to you a little bit about why she didn't graduate high school.

Maggie shot me a look, and I knew I was in trouble. I had invited her to come to the Voc with me today for the assembly, but I hadn't asked her to speak, and neither had Mack – until right now and really, there was no way Maggie could say no. Maggie hopped down from where we were sitting with all the other GSA members on the edge of the stage, and she took the center of the floor. “Uh, I don't know what to say exactly,” she started tentatively, and then looking right at me with a smirk continued, “because Kaila just called me and I drove here,”. Whoops. Still, Maggie thought fast on her feet, and though it had been a few years, she had also, in her day, told her story to teacher groups and youth conferences. It only took her a moment to get her bearings, and then she was off.

Uh, I went to the Hilltown middle school, and then Hilltown North and then I went to Franklin High. And I met Mack the first week at Hilltown North on the bus and we were the only two gay kids that I knew in all of Hilltown. I went through a lot of shit in high school. [Later at Franklin High] I was the only gay kid that anyone knew, and I wasn't ashamed of it and I was really out, I had a girlfriend, and I got threatened a lot – I got death threats a lot, I got rape threats a lot – I had a teacher call me a dyke in the classroom in tenth grade or 11th grade and by the end of my junior year I had stopped going to school completely, I was skipping everyday and I dropped out. Because I couldn't deal with the hassle of people calling me faggot everyday, and people writing faggot on my car, and hitting my car with things, and it's just really messed up. So when you say things to people – when you just thoughtlessly say things like ‘oh that's gay’ or ‘you're such a homo’, when other people hear that – you might not know that they're gay – but it really hurts them.

And as Maggie walked back over to take her place at the edge of the stage, Mack again took the floor, and picked up right where Maggie had left off.

The word faggot disgusts me...faggot comes from the word, it means to burn sticks, they used to burn gay people and call them faggots and that's

how it came to be a negative word to homosexuals. So if I hear you saying it I will report you. I will find out your name and I will report you. I know I walk through the halls and I hear 'gay, fag, homo' a lot, a lot more than I should....So I talked to the faculty, like we had a late start [to class] about a month ago and me and a few other GSA members came in [early] and we talked to faculty and I said 'look we need your help, we don't want this to happen anymore, please call out students on it', and so faculty's gonna start cracking down if they hear gay, fag, homo – especially now that we've talked. I have a lot of connections with teachers and faculty in this building and I talk to them a lot, they keep me up to date about what's going on. Last year we had a few kids that were just continually harassing the same kids, calling them fag and homo. Well me and a few other GSA members went to their classroom and took them out of class and had a little talk with them. A lot of teachers know me around here so all I have to do is ask to talk to one of you -

A few of the freshmen smirked at this, but then they looked up to see that Mack wasn't smiling. She was threatening them, and they got it pretty fast. Maybe sensing this reaction Mack eased up a bit, relaxing her body posture and tone and continuing, "just, I'd really appreciate it if you guys' helped us out and if you hear gay, fag, homo...say something. It really doesn't take a lot". She didn't have to repeat herself.

Beyond the Assembly

Ethnographers love the high school assembly, even though it is a relatively rare occurrence in the high school – something taking place one or twice a year as opposed to the daily interactions that happen in the classroom-hallway-lockerroom-shop-etc.¹⁶⁷ Yet it captivates the attention of scholars who work in high schools, because it invariably offers great drama and operates as one of the few times when the 'hidden curriculum' of the high school becomes explicit, where we might imagine the captive audiences' attention is finely tuned as their minds are filled with ideology like a pitcher with water. While this is certainly not in reality the case, what the assembly does offer are these

¹⁶⁷ Witness the attention paid to the assembly in two recent ethnographies about youth (Childress, 2000; Pascoe, 2007).

neatly bounded moments which illuminate things that happen in a much more subtle and nuanced way on a day to day basis, but which are in the assembly are blown up and blown out, scripted and overacted, giving us the dramatic moments and the easily quotable quotes that we academics love.

Yet ironically, what's interesting in this instance is that to some degree, what happened in this high school assembly would indeed set the stage for the more important, daily interactions in the halls of the Voc. And just like in this assembly, Mack would be the key player there too, the one who was called in to mediate issues of homophobia among the students, the one whose name was invoked (successfully) as a threat to stop folks from saying certain terms. She was, for all intents and purposes, the one-woman homosexual United Nations of the Voc. In no small part this was due to her sense of humor – something that was both naturally a part of her personality and also something strategically cultivated as a way to diffuse potentially hostile situations. It was a response also to her own problematic history at the Voc where she spent her Freshman year being teased and referred to as 'President Butch'. And overall, her strategy worked. She could count among her friends even the most homophobic 'hick' (as I'll discuss later on), using her humor to try to get them to change their views.

While she had laid down the law in the first half of the assembly described above, towards the end she eased up and used some of her trademark humor, breaking the tension and getting everyone to laugh. Right after Elliot – one of the few 'out' gay males - spoke in his quiet and somewhat effeminate voice about how nervous he was changing in the locker room last year and how some of the seniors had made fun of him, Mack jumped right in, "in eighth grade it would happen to me in the locker room, they'd be like

‘I don’t want to change in front of Mack’ and I’d be like ‘you are *not* that good looking anyway!’ [everyone laughs] Now in gym class I don’t care, everybody knows I’m not checking them out,” she paused, and then thought better, “everybody *is* probably checking *me* out!”. Over the laughter Tiffany remarked loudly, “all the girls want Mack and the guys are jealous”. And, to some extent, this was true. In regards to the assembly though, it was a great strategy – if Mack didn’t scare the freshman into obedience, she won them (and their obedience) over with her humor.

Yes, both in the assembly and in the halls, Mack was one of the main reasons why the Voc was as ‘safe’ as it was. Yet interestingly she did not view the school to be nearly as safe as did the adults. She shared this with me one day, in many ways accidentally, after months of my interviews with various administrators and teachers who had told me all the same stories about how good it was at the Voc.

Kaila - so how is it [being queer at the Voc] cause I interviewed the guidance counselor- (Mack interrupts me)

Mack – and she probably said ‘it seems to me that every thing is really well, everything is really good’

Kaila – yeah!

Mack – mm-hmm (in sarcastic tone)

Kaila - the principal said that too

Mack – mm-hmm, yeah

Kaila - and the teacher

Mack - it just depends on who you are. Like the guidance counselors and stuff like they don’t see it, they’re not like in the hallways, and they’re not in the locker rooms.

Here Mack showed an astute understanding of the official ‘school line’ (that ‘everything is good’) and also of *why* the school officials had that understanding: it wasn’t that they were lying, it wasn’t that they were delusional, it was just that they weren’t on the frontlines. As Mack herself noted in discussing the school line that it was ‘all good’, “I wish I could hang out in the guys locker room just to see what it’s like,

[cause] I bet it's worse than even I know at my school". And actually, just a few weeks later Mack herself would come to know just how 'bad' it actually could be for queer students at the Voc.

The T-Shirt

The call came around 11p.m. It was Mack, and she sounded upset. "Kaila yo – I fucking got suspended at school today". *What!?* I exclaimed, shocked, *what happened?* "I fucking got suspended for being *gay*." This didn't sound right to me. Everybody at the Voc – students, teachers and administrators alike – loved Mack. *Slow down*, I said on the phone with her, *tell me what happened from the beginning*.

Me and Sasha were at the GSA meeting yesterday and these people from SMAK came in to run a workshop. Well, it wasn't really like a workshop, they just told us about SMAK and how we should come to the meetings, cause you know no ones been going since you and Sammy left, but anyways they said we should come and blah blah blah but then they also brought in shit to decorate t-shirts with. So me and Sasha we made these t-shirts that said DYKE on them and so I wore mine today and – yo, I fucking got *yelled at* by fucking Mr. Samson for it. Like he told me it was offensive and that I couldn't come into class wearing it, and I'm like, how the hell is it offensive, I'm a fucking lesbian. And he was all, you can't take that tone with me, your outta here, I'm sick of all this liberal bullshit, it's offensive and that's it. And I'm like, okay, so it's offensive that I'm gay? And he just yelled at me and sent me to see Rod [Mr. Rodderick, the principal]. So I'm like fuck that, you know, and as I'm walking to Rods office I text Sasha and tell her what's going on and so she goes and puts on her t-shirt, cause you know, she's good like that, and she walks into CAD [the acronym for Computer Aided Design, Sasha's vocational shop] and Ms. Meyers told her she had to turn her t-shirt inside out if she wanted to stay in class. And of course she's like that's bullshit, so she doesn't, and next thing I know I'm at Rods office and I'm like crying and shit, and Sasha walks in and we both just sit down and we're like no, this is crap, we're not gonna take this.

I got a word in edgewise at this point, only I think because Mack had to finally take a breath. *So wait*, I asked, *they wanted you guys to take off the shirts or be...suspended?*

She said yeah, that the teachers and the principal were saying that it was a double

standard because ‘if a student called me a dyke they’d have to punish them, so why could I just wear a shirt that said it if it was an offensive term?’ – they said ‘that’s a double standard and it’s not fair’. At this moment I was relieved because I had known the guidance counselor and the principal for some time and had found them to be committed to equality in their school. So it wasn’t, as Mack had first said in her fit of (understandable) outrage and frustration, that she had gotten in trouble for ‘being gay’. Rather, I thought at the time, what has happening here was simply the invocation of an outdated model of ‘political correctness’, where certain terms or words were deemed blanketly offensive and off-limits to everyone, regardless of context. As someone who spent time teaching about the resignification and reclamation of terms as a key part of minority activist politics, I understood that the shirts these girls made were not at all offensive, rather they were a key moment in the expression of their sexual identities. They were ‘taking back’ a term that had been used against them, claiming it now as a word of power and inclusion, not disenfranchisement and exclusion. It was, actually, a *good thing*. And I said as much to Mack. “Kaila, I know! We talked about that at SMAK, right? And I tried to tell them that and they were like, not getting it at all. So we’re having a meeting tomorrow about it, to like discuss it and see if we’re gonna get suspended or whatever and I really need you to come in and like, tell them that shit. Make them understand.” *Okay*, I told her, *I’ll be there*. This calmed her down some, though I couldn’t convince her to not wear the DYKE shirt to the meeting.

The next day I sat in a circle of desks in a classroom at the Voc. There were eleven of us in all – the principal, two guidance counselors, three teachers (one of whom ran the GSA), two male students (who were gay but not involved in ‘the incident’),

Sasha, Mack and myself. While the circle gave the illusion of equality and solidarity, the lines soon became drawn. We went back and forth, debating the appropriateness of the shirts (the appropriateness of Mr. Samson's 'tirade' against Mack was completely swept under the rug, and in fact, all year I never got anybody except Mack to confirm that it had actually happened. Samson himself was a no-show at the meeting). The girls gave their side of the story, the administration theirs. While the meeting was long and angst-ridden, the basic sides came down to this: the girls felt like it was their right to proclaim their identity and to be 'out and proud' – the administration, while supporting the pride the girls took in their sexual identities, could not allow them to use a term that others would be punished for using. It was simply a question of fairness. The irony, of course, was that Mack was in trouble for using one of the terms she herself had cautioned (read: threatened) the freshman *not* to use – a detail several of the adults in the room seemed to take pleasure in pointing out.

While I knew I was 'supposed' to be there as an observer, I couldn't help but get involved in the debate. I spun a great story about minority politics, the history of groups reclaiming problematic terms, the importance of context and positionality when terms are used (i.e. paying attention to who said them, in what tone and setting). I gave the example of 'queer', a term that several of the gay identified adults in the room *hated*. I talked about how it used to be a slur, and now it has been reclaimed to such an extent that students can actually take classes in Queer Studies. That the term was not held in favor by all of the 'queer' community, I argued, pointed to the importance of positionality – especially age and generation, but also class, gender, race and ethnicity – and how we needed to pay attention to the complex ways that our many identities interact. It wasn't

the case, I contended, that a word was ‘bad’ or ‘good’ – rather, this would have to be determined on a case-by-case basis where the context of the word was taken into account. In response I was told, essentially, that that was all well and good but that *this is the real world*: “We can’t explain ‘context’ or any of those ‘academic’ fuzzy-boundaries terms to high school students, they won’t get it,” they said, “all the students would see is unequal treatment”.

At first I was struck by the irony of referring to high school as the ‘real world’, for surely, high school is the *antithesis* of the real world; it’s the time without bills, mortgages, responsibilities and children; it’s the reason that adults treat teenagers like they are on an extended vacation, the reason they tell them to enjoy high school because it’s the ‘time of their lives’; it’s what gives inspiration to bad Jon Mayer songs and nostalgic high school reunions. But then I realized something very important, something so basic I wasn’t quite sure how I missed it before: *that* is the conception of *traditional* high schools, not vocational high schools; and *that* is the conception of a *middle-class* high school, not a working-class one. Because in this working-class high school many of the student-workers had bills, they had responsibilities, and some of them even had children. And in the vocational school, the student-workers aren’t just students – they are workers, already in the ‘real world’ of work. This is critical, and it changes the context considerably, because in conflicts such as these, the invested parties are not simply students and teachers, but also *employees* and *bosses*. Whereas in a conflict in a traditional high school, the teachers could come to any ‘solution’ they deemed appropriate, without worrying whether the students agreed, in contrast, an employer

wishing to continue to reap productive work from their employees, is *economically invested* in finding a suitable mutual solution. Such was the case here.

Even though the issue was not ‘resolved’, by the time the fifth period bell rang there had been some kind of settlement. The adults had finally acknowledged the importance of the resignification of terms, but it became clear that that was as far as they were willing to go. The ‘compromise’ was that the girls could wear the shirts, and the students could self-identify as anything they wanted, *while in the GSA meeting*. Outside of those meetings another set of rules applied, ostensibly to avoid the kind of disciplinary nightmare caused by not attending to issues uniformly across the board. But as hinted at in the above quote, it wasn’t simply the logistics (time, effort, etc.) of dealing with issues on a case-by-case basis that the administration took issue with, rather it was the *liability* such an approach would incur. As the principal noted, “We have a pretty simple formula. When a kid makes a homophobic remark or a racist remark we make sure that there’s an educational moment. And subsequent to that we discipline, and we do it unequivocally and we do it uniformly”.

The key to this ‘zero tolerance policy’ was the administrations argument that students were too young to understand ‘context’ or other mediating factors, as Shelly the guidance counselor would note later in our interview. In reflecting upon ‘T-shirtgate’ Shelly leaned back and said, “you know, I understand the wanting to take back the words and own them but, that process I don’t think...I don’t think they’re *developmentally* there enough to be able to handle what that’s about – they tend to abuse it. I mean, life experience has to come in a little bit so that people can take back words, you know?” And here she leaned forward, “but we were certainly in support of where they were coming

from, I mean, you saw it in the discussion.” And indeed, I had. But the question was, was such theoretical support of an underlying ideology enough, especially when it didn’t ultimately change or challenge the climate at the Voc school?

Theoretical Collapse: Theirs and Mine

While we may initially view the ‘settlement’ that students could wear their t-shirts only in the GSA meeting as acceptable given that we view high schools as places for learning, the fact is that socialization into identities (and among groups of youth) is, absolutely, a critical part of high school. Indeed, given that we view adolescence as the prime time for sexual experimentation and gendered identity formation, gender and sexuality takes on heightened importance in the halls of the school. What is important to understand here then is that the *entire high school* served as a space for the expression of identity, and sexual identities were no exceptions. The kissing in the hallways, the explicit notes written on bathroom walls, the ‘double dates’ in the cafeteria – all of these illustrated how the high school was a space used for the expression of *heterosexuality*. We could even see it, ironically enough, on t-shirts. For example, during my time at the Voc I saw a senior boy wearing a t-shirt of a cartoon deer hunter whose buddy looks at the carcasses on the back of his pickup and proclaims ‘Nice Rack’. I also witnessed a sophomore boy in his carpentry shop wearing a ‘Hooters’ t-shirt. Finally, at the GSA presentation itself, a freshman boy sitting in the front row wore a t-shirt with a picture of a plastic blow-up sex toy shaped like a woman over the caption “What a Doll!”. In each

of these instances the male students faced no ramifications from teachers or administrators – rather, such proclamations of heterosexuality were tacitly accepted.¹⁶⁸

In reality, I believe they were accepted precisely because of the gender transgressions at the Voc; *transgressions about gender which simultaneously produced a set of anxieties about homosexuality*. Indeed, I argue that the Voc was very gender transgressive, largely due to Perkins III, and because of the history of vocations as offering a space for alternative gender expressions, in particular – female masculinities (Weston, 1998). The school encouraged non-traditional gender-transgressive shop exploration, and non-traditional gender-transgressive dress as well. Yet as I looked back on my data, on all the examples people gave me to illustrate the Voc as a ‘queer friendly’ place (the girls wearing boys robes at graduation, the class couple being an FTM and his girlfriend) I realized – suddenly – that every example was (or at least could be read as) an issue of gender, *not* sexuality. What I realized then was that the acceptance of queer sexual transgression was only a corollary effect of a gender transgressive program, and

¹⁶⁸ And it wasn’t simply a question of t-shirts. Indeed, in one focus group I held with members of the GSA, Elliot noted that he and his boyfriend Marshall got differential treatment in their shop. Sarah, one of the junior girls who was also in their shop interrupted him to offer backup, “yeah, they treat you guys differently. I see it”. Elliot continued, “they treat us differently then other couples. You all know Talia and Brandon – they’re always all over each other! Well, one time – *one time* – I put my hand on Marshall’s leg... Sarko [the shop teacher] pulled us into the backroom and screamed at us for a half an hour”. Sarko, as he would later explain in his defense to another student who complained, was not being homophobic in this instance, he was simply enforcing the schools strict no-PDA (Public Displays of Affection) policy. This, in fact, was the common reasoning in any of the instances where queer students felt targeted for their behavior (or dress). The story went more or less like this, ‘well, we have a very strict policy against x, y or z, and I can’t let you get away with it without seeming like I am giving you special treatment for being gay’. But in reality, most often it was the case that straight individuals or couples ‘got away’ with x, y or z on a daily basis without being reprimanded. Whether the issue was PDA, or a t-shirt, the reality was that there was indeed a double standard, and ‘special treatment’ was regularly given to heterosexuals.

while it was a nice effect (and one the administration took great pride in), it was only that – a side effect. When the topic was explicitly about homosexuality, in contrast, the administration was not so transgressive, not so accepting. And that's what marked T-shirtgate as different: it was explicitly an expression of queer sexuality, there was no getting away from it, no collapsing it into gender. Thus it raised all of the anxieties about homosexuality that Rubin (1984) argues is produced whenever there is gender deviance.

In short, my argument is that a certain degree of gender transgressive acceptance was mistakenly taken as evidence of a greater tolerance for sexual diversity than in fact existed. In order to understand my argument here a few things must be noted. First, we must understand that gender and sexuality are two separate (though interconnecting) systems (Rubin, 1984), which have a tendency to collapse into each other discursively if we are not careful. Indeed, I believe this collapse happened on two different levels at the Voc: First, it happened on the administrative level, when they gave evidence of gender transgression as examples of their gay-friendly policy. Secondly, and much more concerning to me – was that it happened to *me*. During my time at the Voc, in analyzing my data after the fact, in writing the first draft of my chapter – all this time I was trying to figure out why it was so 'gay friendly' and why – given that context – the t-shirt incident rested uneasily for me. Indeed, it was a reanalysis of Tshirtgate that finally allowed me to identify what was going on in this place after all, and all it was was the collapse of gender and sexuality that I had been teaching about for nearly a decade. And I didn't catch it.

So, it turns out, in some ways Mack was in some ways right when she said she 'got in trouble for being gay'. And she learned the hard way that she had also been right in our interview when she told me it wasn't necessarily 'all good' at the Voc like the

administration makes it seem. Overall the infamous ‘Zero Tolerance’ policy was said to be followed by “most every teacher...with some exceptions”. Interestingly, as I would come to find out, the ‘exceptions’ tended to be in the vocational shops. As Ms.Sanders noted, “I have no tolerance for ‘oh that’s gay’, calling names [in my classroom], I think less of that happens in the academic classes whereas in some of the shops kids are more on their own and some of that does happen.” The guidance counselor, Shelly, agreed noting, “if you think about it, you can do a lot of control in a 42 minute period with kids in desks. When you’ve got...say a full shop – that’s a collection of between 24 and 30 kids and they’re all doing different things in different places...say in Autotech, they’re 24 kids in there with 2 instructors and a lot of stuff can happen behind tires and it’s really hard to catch.” But actually, there’s something else going on in the shops too, something that isn’t about the number of students, but rather something about gender.

Indeed, perhaps part of what is happening in the shops is *in reaction* – it’s about reinscribing ‘nontrad’ students into their ‘place’ by using sexist or homophobic slurs. Certainly that is one potential explanation, and I think it’s clear that acceptance of gender transgression can offer some radical possibilities for playing with gender *and sexuality* (as long as it is not made explicitly about sexuality – as long as it is primarily expressed or read through gender). But it is equally clear that there exists a simultaneous production of anxieties here too, ones clearly experienced by the students but also – and this is crucial – one experienced by the teachers and administrators as well.

Indeed, when I came to look at the Voc as a site of both (gender) transgression and (sexual) anxiety, I was forced to look at the administrations’ response and reaction to events I witnessed in a different light. While “T-shirtgate” or the policing of gay youths’

public displays of affection can, to the students, seem like evidence of the administrations' homophobia, I began to see that these responses may actually reveal adult concern for the safety of queer students. For regardless of whether the 'gay friendly' atmosphere was simply a 'side effect' of the liberal gender policy, the fact remained that it was a point of pride not just for the students, but for all of the adults that I talked to. The principal, teachers, and guidance counselors couldn't give an explanation for 'why' their school was experienced as a 'safe space' for gay kids, *but they were happy and proud that it was*. Moreover, this was a climate that they wanted to maintain. And while they may not have known why the climate existed, they knew it was tenuous (at best) and anything that threatened it – anything that threatened to bring the tensions that were bubbling just under the surface to a boil – well, that put the climate of safety at risk, and so the administration came down and they came down hard. But they came down, ultimately, because they cared.

And this is crucial. For it would be easy to come to the analytic conclusion that the 'safe space' was simply a corollary affect of gender policies, and to then dismiss both the perspectives of the students (who did – overwhelmingly - experience the school as a safe space), and the intentions of the administration (who also overwhelmingly were thrilled that the students experienced it as such). Indeed, this kind of reductivism is what we tend to do when we look on these issues at a larger scale, when individuals or groups of individuals become straw men – “policy makers”, “administrators” – easily demonized, difficult to understand. But understand them we must if we are to resist the temptation to slide into the easy argument, if we are going to take the more difficult road of exploring difficult actions, complex worlds, and the competing interests these 'straw

men' must sometimes negotiate and navigate. It is the same context and understanding that brings us to a more nuanced understanding about the spaces in working-class areas that may both accommodate and serve as a 'safe space' for some gender and sexual 'deviance', while simultaneously policing and limiting these very expressions. Yes, in some ways it's a contradiction – but it's also the *real world*. And if there's anything I learned during my time at the Voc - during my time watching student-workers study for math tests and student-workers build houses from the ground up – it's that the real world isn't 'either/or', it's 'both/and'.

And indeed there was another group of youth coming of age in Hilltown who inhabited the 'real world' in ways that were not only seemingly contradictory, but also used as a means of keeping afloat and alive in a community that did its best to push them into the margins. So while I struggled to understand the complexities at play in the high school, Birdie began to explore the ways in which the 'real world' was negotiated, resisted and in some ways remade by that ubiquitous group of youth on the streets of Hilltown: The Crew.

CHAPTER 6

ENTERING THE CREW

As previously noted, the Crew was both a very visible presence on the streets of Hilltown, and also a ‘hidden population’. I could interact with them only because of my collaboration with Birdie, a Crew ‘insider’. She gave me access to this group commonly beyond the reach of researchers and policy makers. In a discussion I had with Birdie early on in the research project, I expressed my surprise at having heard about Crew members’ queer sexual experiences as I had initially viewed them all as ‘straight’. Birdie responded to my (as she termed it) ‘judgments’ about this groups’ sexuality by explicitly challenging my characterization of the Crew as heterosexual, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

KAILA: I mean, I think like, the Crew stuff, like that’s really interesting, like, I wouldn’t have known that it isn’t as hetero as it appears...

BIRDIE: Does it really appear hetero?

KAILA: Oh, *so* hetero.

BIRDIE: In—how, though, why do you—what makes you create those judgements?

KAILA: Because, well, I don’t see...ever...like, public...

BIRDIE: Public displays?

KAILA: Right. I see like, you know, people like - you and Mike are together, but like, yeah, you don’t see public—I guess [I don’t see] public displays [between same-sex couples]...

BIRDIE: Right. [But] who knows.

KAILA: Who knows...

BIRDIE: I think that...yeah....I think that in our group, there is more...like queer tendencies in the men that we hang out with than in the women. Or, with girls, it is more, just kind of like, you know, the friendship-kissing sort of stuff, or whatever, like..

KAILA: Right....right, right, right...

BIRDIE: But, um....but who’s to say? Yeah, it is pretty interesting. But it doesn’t—it’s like, irrelevant, you know what I mean, in terms of our group of friends, I guess, or something, it’s not like [relevant]

For Birdie, it wasn't relevant to her group because they resisted identity labels, as she had told me earlier in explaining why Crew members didn't go to SMAK meetings.¹⁶⁹ This resistance to identification (something that we would ultimately spend a great deal of time exploring) or a difference in labeling is not only what excludes some people from utilizing community resources, but it is also what limits researchers and policy makers' ideas about queer youth. Indeed, Birdie's challenge of my view of the Crew as heterosexual led me to see that while Crew members might never come to SMAK or attend a GSA meeting, they may have important things to contribute to a project about sexuality, class and rurality.

While Birdie herself was the one to identify the 'Crew' as a group she wanted to conduct research with, she also came to struggle with her split positionality and her responsibility to her friends because, as she noted, "I don't want people to think I'm selling them out." Because of this we did at times struggle with what Atkinson & Flint term 'gatekeeper bias' where, "gatekeepers were sometimes reticent or protective toward those they cared for and sometimes hindered access for the researchers" (2001:3). And indeed, Birdie – as much as she wanted to conduct this research – did also struggle with wanting to protect her friends/subjects. Early on in the research Birdie noted the difficulty she was having in conducting interviews, as the following excerpt from our discussion illustrates.

¹⁶⁹ In our first methodological training meeting I had questioned Birdie about why some of the people she knew did not utilize SMAK. She responded by saying that, "I think that sometimes maybe people feel overwhelmed [because they think at SMAK] that we have to talk about it all the time and that it has to be so prominent and [they might wonder] why can't we all just get together and have a good time and not have that [sexuality] be a main focus...and forget about those identity markers,".

Birdie: crew members don't really want to do interviews with me, which is unfortunate but um...I don't know why, they're not interested in it

Kaila: do you think they'd be more open to doing it with me?

Birdie: I don't know

Kaila: do you think you're just too...connected?

Birdie: I feel like maybe they...their concept of like what 'research' is or something is kind of like – and *it's also something that I'm battling with when doing this* – like how people are going to be represented, you know what I mean?

Kaila: yeah

Birdie: I think that's one of the concerns [of the crew], just like being represented in a way that they don't really relate to or want to be.

Such concern over representation was something I also shared, and it became an endless topic of conversation between Birdie and myself. It is also something we never entirely 'got over' as I'll explore in my final chapter. Despite some initial stumbling blocks, however, we both pushed onward, using our conversations together as 'therapy sessions' to deal with these struggles. While it was difficult – especially for Birdie – I knew, and I believe Birdie also came to see – that this was an incredibly important aspect of the project. For as visible as these kids were, their lives and the challenges they faced, were often hidden – and as such they remained invisible to concerned individuals and seemingly 'beyond help'.

But with Birdie as my guide I was able to become if not an erstwhile member of the group, then at least a tolerated outsider. This transformation was indeed slow, at times painstakingly so, but this was necessary in getting this group to trust me – something made possible only because of my longstanding relationship with Birdie and the fact that I had been seen with her on the streets of Hilltown for years prior to our research. Several months into hanging on the outskirts of this group, Birdie interviewed

me about the research project¹⁷⁰ and I expressed my thoughts about the slow – but promising - process. At the beginning of our interview Birdie asked me how my day of research in Hilltown had been going so far in order, in her words, “to get a feel for where you are at”.

Kaila: being in town today has been really cool because...I felt really like comfortable talking to a lot of people, and like interview opportunities have sort of just presented themselves and that's good, on the one hand. On the other hand, like whenever I'm up here doing the [research] I get really nervous because I'm like – I have so much to do, and I can't believe this is the first time I'm talking on tape with people from the Crew...even though I know that things need to progress at their own stage, and I don't think people – if I had shown up the first day asking to talk to them – like I wouldn't get the same information. That I'm talking to them now, even though they still don't know me, I'm more of a presence that they see...

Birdie: I think people are extremely aware of you in the environment there, and I think that you're right, it has helped that the idea or the conversation has come up about, like – people [will ask] me 'what are you doing today' and I'll mention the research. And so it's been you know, an idea that has been heard.

And indeed, the more it was 'heard' the more people were willing to talk to Birdie – and later – to me. I began to spend more time among the crew, and Birdie was increasingly successful in getting folks to agree to an interview.¹⁷¹ In fact, her interviewing technique improved immensely, and in transcribing her tapes I witnessed her transformation into an adept and 'natural' interviewer. Likewise, the data she produced was transformative to the project as a whole and to my own conceptualization of this hidden population. But before I delve into both our ethnographic data and our analytic findings, I want to pause

¹⁷⁰ Having Birdie interview me was not only part of our methodological training designed to give Birdie more interviewing experience – it was also something I felt was central to our collaboration in terms of me putting myself in the position of being interviewed (something I had never done before, and something Birdie was shocked by).

¹⁷¹ In the end, around ten Crew members took part in formal or informal interviews, and around two dozen of them took part in focus groups as well as more casual conversations related to their lives.

here and explain the form this chapter will take, a form made possible only by my privileged access to this hidden population.

Indeed, most discussions about ‘hidden populations’ look at a group from the only perspective they are allowed: from the outside looking in. So this is how I will begin, by exploring the surface of this group – how they presented to the outside world, how they are viewed by the community. Then, I’ll shift positions and perspectives, as I did when I gained access to this group, and describe the Crew from the ‘inside’ – exploring how this group functions, the lifeworlds of the Crew and the nuances of this created community. I’ll then explore the Crew from the ‘inside looking out’ – explaining not only how the Crew viewed their world and their position within that world, but also exploring my own transformations regarding how I saw and understood this group differently once I stood among them.

For while Birdie had challenged my idea that this group was ‘straight’, and in our early discussion I rid myself of that notion, I still believed that this was how the group was viewed ‘from the outside’. Once again, Birdie would call this into question, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

KAILA: Yeah....So but, here’s the thing, like, imagine if Sam and Dan [a gay male couple from the Voc School] were walking by your group of friends, you know - from their perspective, they would probably think that they’re all straight.

BIRDIE: Mmhmm [affirmative]. But would the first thing they ascribed to the people be that they’re heterosexual or would it be that they’re like, grungy, like ‘no-good’ kids, who are like burn-outs or whatever?

KAILA: Hmm...

BIRDIE: You know, that might even take precedence over [sexuality]. [They might think] that like, “oh we’re in school, we’re in high school, [versus] these kids who failed at that”

Indeed, the specter of failure haunted the Crew, and as Birdie taught me to see, their (ascribed) identities as ‘disaffected’ youth – or dropouts or druggies – took primacy over

any other ‘identities’ they may have, and colored the interactions they had with anybody passing them on the street.

The Sidewalk

At the beginning of my research, the Crew was a ubiquitous presence on the sidewalk in front of The Café – this small section of concrete marked as their territory. That the Crew chose this place in front of the Café as their unofficial meeting ground was no accident, but was indeed carefully selected based on its Main Street location. Main Street is the only way into this community from the freeway connecting Hilltown to the commercial and educational centers to the south and east. From *there* there is only one road to bring you *here*, and as soon as you cross the bridge, you’ll know you’ve arrived. That bridge – the one with the ornate green street lamps oxidized from decades spent illuminating the road and the fast dark water not so far below - will land you right on Main Street, almost directly in front of the Cafe. Located at the intersection of Main Street and Oak Avenue, the Café is both a destination and a gateway. Almost everyone coming into Hilltown – or leaving it - will pass the Café, and anyone hanging out in front of the Café will get a front row seat to the ebb and flow of traffic and people. Thus the youth who congregated in this place were able to not only interact with each other, but also observe and monitor the people coming and going in and through this community. Horns honking and hands waving from passing cars was nearly continuous as mobile friends and acquaintances gave ‘shout outs’ to their stationary compatriots.

The centrality of this location was the major draw for these youth who quickly became a regular fixture on the sidewalk in front. Indeed, almost as soon as The Café was open, the outdoor chairs and tables were nearly continuously occupied by members

of the Crew drinking fifty-cent coffee refills and chain-smoking cigarettes. Hours on end could pass with the same group of youth in this space carving out a daily schedule for themselves that went something like this: greeting friends, smoking cigarettes, talking with friends, smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, making plans for later, smoking cigarettes, complaining about their boss, smoking cigarettes, hugging goodbye, smoking cigarettes, greeting new people, smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, zoning out, bumming cigarettes, smoking cigarettes, catching up with friends, smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, people-watching and smoking cigarettes. They were a fixture on the scene, and to me they were a pleasant group who greeted me with a smile, and later as I came to know them better, with a hug. They didn't seem to cause any trouble. But soon the managers and owners of the Café attempted to free up the tables for other, higher-paying customers, especially the local business employees who purchased seven-dollar sandwiches or salads during their lunch break. Eventually, in a symbolic move to reclaim space, the owners removed the outdoor tables and chairs.

Yet the removal of the outdoor seating area did not deter the youth who had claimed the space in front of the café as their own. Now instead of occupying seats and tables the Crew simply sat on the sidewalk, backs pressed up against the front wall of the Café, their presence creating a nearly ever-present wall of teenagers and smoke through which the cafes other patrons must pass to gain entry. Often these youth were subject to scrutiny by the other customers who told them to 'get a job', 'take a shower' or other offensive remarks muttered sometimes under their breath or often spoken aloud directly to these youth. Eventually, and with the pressure of local businesses, the Café

management began calling the cops to remove the youth, and hung ‘no loitering’ signs in their windows. They also changed their hours, closing earlier, and ceased hosting open-mics and other youth-friendly events. In addition to cutting the hours of their young employees (many of whom worked night shifts), these new managerial changes resulted in drastically limiting the number of youth who would use this space as a community meeting ground.

Soon the Crew would migrate to another new coffee shop – Java – located on the Avenue, the main drag in the north side of Hilltown. Like the Café, Java was centrally located at the major intersection of Hilltown North, around the corner from the bus stop. The youth who had been pushed out from the sidewalk in front of the Café soon took up residence on Java’s stoop, with myself – the lingering anthropologist - in tow. Overwhelmingly the Crew was responsible for the success of this new cafe, providing both the inexpensive labor as well as the initial customer base. But here too, their presence would eventually be maligned by many in the community.

The Bench

Jayke stood outside the gun store again today, staring down Mr. Levassier. This is a pretty regular occurrence. It starts because Jayke, and maybe a few of the other guys, sit down on the bench in front of Levassier’s Gun & Tackle Stop and play guitar, most often some Tom Waits songs, with Dylan providing backup on the harmonica. This could be a Tuesday at 1, or a Saturday at 3, but it is an unscheduled event, and one that never takes place before noon. While folks may congregate for morning coffee and cigarettes on The Avenue in some number by around ten – and a few as early as seven or eight (though these are as likely to be ending their nights as beginning their days) – the

music doesn't come till later (an unspoken rule of sorts, more likely due to the belief in the sanctity of music than the silence of morning). But the music does come, and when it does it does not split the silence of The Avenue like a beacon. No, by this time The Avenue is filled with sounds – beater cars that need new mufflers, parents calling out after kids, horns honked by old men at the young girls in the crosswalk, loud fights between the omnipresent group of old drunks who sit further up on the Ave and sip out of bottles wrapped in brown paper bags. So when the first few chords of “Hold On” are strummed, Jayke’s scratchy voice (a dead on for Waits himself) joins the cacophony of the Avenue, calling the kids to come join and make some noise.

Pretty soon the cops show up. As they get out of the cruiser we all know what’s coming – or at least, the Crew all knew and I stood in for the role of naïve and privileged anthropologist. The cops ask Jayke to move. Jayke tries to hold a conversation with the cop, tries to talk to him about this being a public – and loud – street, and anyways wasn’t it still legal to hang out on a public bench? During his well-intentioned but ultimately futile effort at dialogue, the kids surrounding me roll their eyes, and fill me in on the story - commenting on the ridiculousness of the situation - even as they picked up their backpacks and slowly migrated down the street. This is what I’m told – that they all know who called the cops, that it was “that bastard Levassier”, that he’d had it out for all of them for awhile because he hated the bench in front of his store – or rather he hated the ‘dirty hippie kids’ who congregated on that bench and (in his mind) drove away his customers. Jayke eventually stops trying to reason with the cop, and gets off the bench. But he doesn’t follow us further down the Ave, instead he goes and stands in front of the Gun Stop and stares down Mr. Levassier. It is a hilarious scene – Jayke with his eyebrow

cocked high on this forehead, his eyes squinted into a caricature glare, his guitar slung low across his hips and cocked like a pistol at Mr. Levassier who stands there with the phone in his hand, his finger on redial, waiting for Jayke to say something or start playing again, so he can pull the trigger and summon the police. It is a Showdown at the Not OK Corral – a scene that in its humor hides the significance of this public street as a real site of struggle between the Crew and the community.

Indeed, almost as soon as the ‘new money’ began to flow into Hilltown in the early 2000s, The Avenue became subject to increased policing as different groups (with different ‘interests’ and ‘stakes’ in the matter) began to vie over rights to inhabit the streets of this community. The Avenue quickly became a contentious place, lined with businesses that reflected the different segments of Hilltown (and the struggles between them): the new modern art gallery moved in right next to the Elks Club, the independent bookstore took up shop next to the Five And Dime (which turned a moderate, yet reliable, profit through cigarettes and porno mags), the Gun Stop found itself butting up against the new ‘hip’ coffee shop, and the Chinese food restaurant (offering \$2.99 dinner specials which always scared me but many of the kids swore it was actually pretty decent) became the first neighbor of the new gourmet Italian restaurant - Il Boca –that drew diners from the nearby college towns and whose entrees started at twenty dollars. And there were also the insurance offices, the antique stores, the packie and, of course, Taco Bell – the only fastfood joint on the Avenue.

Of course, Hilltown North hadn’t always looked like this – but with the recent economic and structural changes, the face of Hilltown had shifted dramatically in some ways. Now, on any given Friday night you were as likely to run into a professor from a

nearby private college as you were the guy from the muffler shop in the next town over (the one who always posted inspirational quotes on his billboard from people like Gandhi and Churchill over the price for the tune up special). So in some ways Hilltown changed, and in other ways it didn't. Now young artists frequented the new gallery – debating the meaning of modern art in a postmodern world - but the same old drunks harassed the girl working the counter at the package store. Yet despite this new geography of openness and inclusion – or more honestly in part *through* this new geography of openness and inclusion – the Crew became increasingly subject to surveillance and found themselves forced out of these so-called 'public' spaces.

The above story about 'the bench' then, is only marginally really about the bench – though unbelievably this small public fixture would later instigate a number of town meetings and even an offensive cartoon in the town paper. No, the story about the bench is really about how public space became a site of struggle between disenfranchised youth and local business owners, and later the community writ large. And it's a story I include here because it was one of the only times I witnessed a direct confrontation about physical space between the Crew and 'the Community'. But as I soon found out, such conflicts - while rarely direct – were ubiquitous, and they shed light upon the rifts between an 'insider' and 'outsider' view of the crew.

In order to explain these points I need to switch perspectives here, and begin to illustrate the Crew first from the ethnographic insider's perspective – exploring how the Crew members lived and how the group functioned - and then from the 'insider looking out' perspective – exploring Crew members articulate and insightful perspectives on the world, their place in it, and their thoughts about those troublesome, meddlesome

‘outsiders’. But let me not get ahead of myself. Instead, let me look at ‘the past’, as Birdie and I did in our interviews with Crew members, exploring the family, educational and employment histories that led these individuals to become today’s ‘disaffected youth’.

An Introduction to Lifeworlds Part One: “Everything In My Life Is Broken”

The title for this section is taken from the name of a drawing done by Petunia, the seven year old sister of Shine – one of the members of the Crew. Petunia, a lanky girl with strawberry blond hair and a crooked smile, spent many of her afternoons with her sister and the Crew in front of the Café, while ‘Ma’ (her and Shine’s mother) sat on a stool bar at the Watering Hole – a divey bar around the corner from the Café - which opened, often to a short line of thirsty customers, everyday at 7am. Ma was often first in that line, with one shaking hand holding a lit Mustang brand cigarette and the other wrapped around the wrist of her young and sleepy daughter. When the doors opened and the neon sign was plugged in, Petunia was released from her mothers grasp and told to go find her sister or her brother Dougie and make herself busy. But Petunia knew it would be hours before either of her siblings would be awake, and so she would head around the corner to the Café, drink chocolate milk (provided free of charge by one of the café workers) and snuggle up on the old couch in the corner, reading picture books from the café’s bookshelf or drawing with the crayons stashed in a waxy paper cup until either Shine or Dougie stumbled in hours later, bleary eyed and anxious for their caffeine fix.

Petunia would almost always greet them with a forceful hug and a huge smile as she proudly showed off her latest masterpiece. One morning the masterpiece was a crayon drawing of a little girl sitting in a tree, as she explained to Shine excitedly,

tripping over her words because she just couldn't get them out fast enough "see – there's this girl and she's so pretty and the tree – the tree is her mom, and sun is her father!" "Oh sweetie, it's beautiful," Shine said, "but where's the sun, where's her father?" Petunia looked from Shine to the picture and then to Shine again and said "but her father isn't there. That's why there's no sun. And I'm the girl, Shine, I'm the girl, and I call the picture 'everything in my life is broken'," and she grinned, so proud of herself, as Shine - kneeling down to meet Petunia's height - clasped her hand over her mouth as tears fell from her eyes. "Shhh...it's okay," Petunia said, rubbing Shine's back, "it's okay to cry – it's a sad picture."¹⁷²

In fact, "A Sad Picture" may be a more appropriate title to this section which explores the families and backgrounds of many of the youth who would grow up to become a part of the Crew, those 'disaffected' youth that many academics, policy makers, and social program leaders hope to engage in their projects. Most of these youth will never partake of community resources and social services – and for good reason. In fact, for many of these kids, they had already learned what it means to be a part of 'the state'. Indeed, many of the Crew members were (literally) born into state programs, their parents receiving WIC (Women, Infant & Children) benefits for them from the moment of their birth. Other Crew youth were enrolled into state programs, like foster care or the public educational system, as young children – and their early negative experiences in these programs had taught them that their best bet was staying off the radar as much as possible. And so their present world and position in a 'hidden population' was no accident. They learned early on, like Petunia, that their lives were broken, and they also

¹⁷² This story was recounted to me by Birdie, who witnessed this particular interaction.

came to believe, in many ways rightfully so, that it could not be fixed. The best they could do was to hold it together as much as possible until the bottom fell out from underneath them – something that was not an ‘if’ but rather, a ‘when’.

These realities may shock us, as teenagers are often thought of as full of potential and possibilities and hope. But here, as I came to find out, there were limited potentials, few possibilities, and almost no hope. Instead here was the ‘disillusionment and disenchantment’ which come to define the ‘disaffected youth’ of policy and academic discourse. And central to understanding the Crew – their present lives and constructed community – is to understand their backgrounds, to see the rocky and unstable paths that brought them here today. In our interviews and conversations with the crew Birdie and I tried to do this, but many would refuse to talk about their pasts. The ones who did, however, offered us a rare glimpse into this sad picture – where even seven year olds know that everything in their life is broken.

Lifeworlds Part One: Childhood, or, “I’d Rather Not Talk About It”

I’ve never met any of these kids parents. I don’t see them – I see kids out – kids from 12 to 19 just out in the middle of the night...tons of kids whose parents are – either their parents drink too much or they do dope or snort coke or they’re just insane, have some sort of mental illness, and these kids - there’s nothing for them. (Quote from Birdie’s interview with Stevo)

Over and over in the interviews Birdie conducted with Crew members like Stevo, people commented on the kids let loose on the streets of Hilltown. Indeed, many of the Crew members had themselves once been one of these kids – kids like Petunia who found ways to busy themselves while their parents struggled with addictions, or mothers worked double shifts in order to feed their families. In none of these stories were the idyllic childhoods of doting parents and cushioning from the harsh realities of the world that so

often define our cultural imaginings of childhood. In our world, as Bruhm & Hurley note, “[u]topianism follows the child around like a family pet. The child exists as a site of almost limitless potential (its future not yet written and therefore unblemished),” (2004:xiii). While we may view such an idealized vision as the ‘norm’ of what it means to be a child, such a notion is indeed a fiction, a construction, whereby, “the child is the product of physical reproduction, but functions just as surely as a figure of cultural reproduction,” (ibid.). And as Wyn & White point out, that reproduction is different across time and space as “youth and childhood have had and continue to have different meanings depending on young people’s social, cultural and political circumstances,” (1997:10).

If childhood is imagined to be the time of unconditional love and parental encouragement, from what we found in talking to the Crew, childhood doesn’t exist for many in Hilltown. But if we understand this conceptualization of childhood as classed, we can see that while this middle-class kind of childhood doesn’t exist, the ‘other’ kind of childhood, the childhood characterized by Nikolas Rose as “the most intensively governed sector of personal existence,” (1999:123) may be overly represented among members of the working-class. Indeed, many of these youth had early on been enrolled into the “panoply of programmes” (ibid.) that not only target children but also enlist their parents into projects of the state through programs such as housing assistance, welfare and foster care.

While several of the Crew members had gone through the foster care system, not a single one of them would discuss their experiences with Birdie and I on tape. One of their friends, however, did – on the condition of absolute anonymity - thus I alone

conducted the interview with Nameless. As our discussion went on, I came to get a better sense of why none of the former foster-care kids felt like kicking up the dust of childhood memories. As Nameless told me, “I mean, I have one friend who grew up in a foster home where the kitchen was locked 24/7 except for 20 minutes at 6 o’clock in the morning and 20 minutes at 6 o’clock in the evening and you had to run in and get your food,”. In another instance a friend of Nameless lived in a foster care home where the kids were not only expected to perform ‘chores’ like work horses but also received regular beatings from both of their foster parents. In one instance Nameless’s friend X, who lived in such a scenario, “tried to talk to his social workers and his social workers wouldn’t believe him, and he ended up running away from the foster care system when he was like 16 - and this was after being taken out of a really bad home environment, and then he grew up in [town name deleted], getting called a faggot and getting the shit kicked out of him everyday,”. Nameless also talked to me about the kids who “*should* have been in foster care and weren’t – who *weren’t* taken out of their homes,” – ‘homes’ which were often not homes at all but were the back seats of cars or sleeping bags lined up in the hallways of crack houses while their mom turned tricks in a bedroom in exchange for a rock of crack to get her through the night.

For other crew members, homelessness, frequent evictions and middle-of-the-night moves was a regular part of their childhood experiences. In fact, several crew members had moved to Hilltown from other Massachusetts cities because they, or their parents, were offered a Section 8 (housing assistance) program apartment in Hilltown Glen – the housing ‘projects’. This was the case for Shine and Petunia, as Shine told me, “we were homeless and stuff for years and years and years. Finally [Ma] got

approved...got a Section 8 approved...it was a good thing. She's got her own apartment up in the Glen,". Her brother Dougie, who had gotten evicted from his apartment in a neighboring town because, as he told me, "I was living in a crack house and we weren't paying our rent because we were too busy smoking crack," eventually came and lived in Ma's new Glen apartment. In one sense he was one of the lucky crew members who had a roof over his head. But in other ways, he wasn't so lucky, as became apparent in one of our interviews.

DOUGIE – I lived with my mom for a little while. Which was fine, you know, back then, when I was a little younger and she wasn't such a bitch. But now...it's like walking on eggshells. I keep to myself, if she talks to me I talk to her, but if she's a bitch to me I'm a bitch right back. And that's the problem right there. Like, I can't keep doing that. I gotta just take it, and swallow my pride.

KAILA – that's hard though

DOUGIE – this is the only woman in my life I've ever been in a fist fight with.

KAILA - you were in a fist fight with your mom?

DOUGIE – five or six.

KAILA – why?

DOUGIE – cause we were drunkards.

KAILA – first of all, I would not fight your mom. Your mom would kick my ass.

DOUGIE – probably (laughing) she can fuck you up. She can fuck me up! But see, I know what she does. So I just avoid her until I can get a punch in.

KAILA – seriously, why have you guys been in fights?

DOUGIE – one time I stole 20 bucks from her and she got pissed. She got waaaasted. And I was like 17 years old, and she comes downstairs and she doesn't say anything, she just walks over, she punches me right in the fucking face...So I stood up and I grabbed her by the throat and I gave her a good one and I sent her flying over the back of the couch. And she stood up and she grabbed me by the face and she smashed me right here with her forehead like six or seven times and knocked me right out. I woke up like a minute later, and she was just laughing her ass off. A couple of time we'd beat the shit out of each other – like we'd be pissed off – and then when we were done we just looked at each other and just started laughing, and then had a beer. You know, something like that. But it's cool. No hard feelings. At all.

And it was true – Dougie didn’t harbor resentment to Ma, whose behavior he explained to me was because “she’s kinda bipolar and stuff – a little bit, not too bad”. Indeed, Dougies lack of resentment to Ma became all the more surprising the more he told me stories, including one about how Ma had forced him to drop out of school at 17 in order to help out with his younger sister. As he told me, “she got pregnant, she had Petunia, and [when] she was like two years old Ma went on a HUGE fucking drinking binge. But more power to her, you know? It ended. And then it started again. And it ended. And then it started again. But you know what, I don’t hold it against her.” No, instead he got a tattoo of a heart with the word Ma on his forearm – or, more specifically, he gave himself the tattoo with a sewing machine needle and pen ink one night after getting wasted. Ma never seemed all that touched by the gesture.

Despite what Dougie said, it did seem ‘all that bad’ to me, as did my own interactions with Ma, who several times during the course of my research stumbled drunk from the Watering Hole over to the Café back when they still allowed the Crew to congregate out front. One time in particular she saw me talking to Dougie on tape and she started yelling at him to shut his ‘fucking face’, that he knew better than to talk ‘to some bitch on tape’. I shut that tape recorder off so fast, let me tell you. Dougie antagonized her by picking the tape recorder up, turning it on, and reciting both his name and his social security number into the microphone. I could have *died* when he did that, but he just laughed as Ma’s face turned redder and she flew off the handle. In hindsight it was the only time I was happy to see Ma drunk at 11:30 in the morning, because if she hadn’t been so wasted, she would have kicked my ass. Instead I got ‘off’ with her tossing some incoherent swear words and a little spit in my direction – I was terrified, but the

Crew thought it was hilarious. None of them were scared of her – clearly – as they shouted out ‘ok Ma go get yourself another drink’ and ‘yeah time for another one!’. I think I was probably still shaking when I got home.

In addition to surviving the foster care system, or enrolling in housing assistance programs, many of the Crew youth had had incredibly negative experiences within the educational system, at one of the many public schools in Hilltown. Of all the crew youth we talked to, not a single one of them had graduated from high school, though a few of them had been homeschooled, and many of them had taken it upon themselves to get their GEDs. Some of the youth, like Dougie, left high school in order to stay home and help raise their siblings, others left high school to go to work and help their parents pay for rent, utilities and groceries. Some youth were taken out of school by their parents as punishment for ‘bad behavior’ at home, and others were pushed out of their high schools by hostile teachers who called the girls ‘sluts’ and the boys ‘shitheads’ in the middle of class (though, it was pointed out to me more than once, that there were also really good teachers, teachers who really cared, even though they were few and far between).

So how were these youth supposed to respond to that kind of treatment? Some left, and some stayed, though none of them stayed for very long. Mike, one of the crew members who felt like his teachers treated him badly at school didn’t drop out at first, largely because of the social network the school provided, as he explained, “I kept going – you know, like I wasn’t really learning or doing work but I kept going so I could hang out, smoke doobies at school and shit. I used to bring water bottles and a half gallon of Absolute [vodka] *every day*. You know, me and my friends would pitch in, get this big

old bottle of vodka and sit in school all day and just get drunk. It was pretty fun,”.

Though the fun didn’t last all that long, and Mike eventually left high school for good.

Other youth were kicked out of school by the administration, an example of which is provided by Stevo who was expelled from Hilltown High School because he was blamed for a number of ‘bomb threats’. Not only did Stevo swear up and down that he never made bomb threats, many of the youth believed the bomb threats to be fictions, created by the administration in order to (successfully) implement a series of surveillance measures (which would, in some ways, prefigure the increased policing and surveillance of these youth later enacted by the community-at-large). As Stevo told Birdie, “I was on my best behavior there, and I did all my work, and I tried really really hard. And then the education system around here completely fucked me in the ass and just ruined - the people at the school ruined my life and my future and now pretty much I can’t get a job because of a few people in town who thinks that it doesn’t matter if Stevo Smith gets a job or graduates high school, or can do anything.”

Of course, there are more sad stories to include here – more quotes about shitty teachers and abusive parents. Indeed, the past lifeworlds of the Crew could fill a book. But what I want to do here instead is to take a step back – to characterize the Crew’s pasts from a distance. For although there were so many different (and so many sad) histories – there were two common threads which ran through nearly all of them. The first was the shared - indeed ubiquitous - early and negative experiences I have described with ‘the state’ and its myriad institutions (the foster care system, the welfare/housing system, and the educational system). The second thread was the lack of a ‘safety net’ – both financial and emotional – in the childhood experiences of the Crew. Indeed, these

kids learned quickly and early on that there was nobody to catch them if they fell, nobody to bail them out (either literally or more metaphorically) if – or more realistically - *when* they got in trouble. As Stevo told Birdie, “I don’t really feel like I’ve ever had a safety net. I don’t know what it’s like to be able to call my mom and be like ‘uh, I need your help’. I don’t really have anybody I can call for help”.

These two crucial elements – early negative experiences with programs of the state and the lack of a safety net - were not only the dividing line between the Crew and other youth in Hilltown, but were also served as the foundation for the conscious community the Crew would come to build. For here – as I will show – the Crew created a community that acted as a safety net, that provided not only protection in numbers but also a modicum of emotional and financial support. Here they also came to foster a specific subjectivity – one characterized to the outsider as ‘disillusioned’ but one which, to this ‘insider’/ethnographer was in reality an astute analysis of both the world and the Crew’s position within that world. And lastly, here was the alternative reality so many of them craved. While there were indeed limitations to this community – and internal divisions at times as well – what I will focus on next are the overarching commonalities, experiences and perspectives, that came to define the Crew as I knew them.

An Introduction to Lifeworlds Part Two: Living Without A Net

I named this book *Without a Net* because I wanted to capture the breathtaking, exhilarating, and scary experience of going through life knowing that there is no safety net to catch you should you fuck up and fail. There is no trust fund, no parents with cash on hand to cover a month’s rent; the way the stress of being poor or working-class can rip apart a family or destroy its members often means there’s no family to call, period. (Tea, 2003:xiii)

In the introduction to Michelle Tea’s collected volume subtitled “The Female Experience of Growing Up Working Class”, she meditates on the lived realities of those who grow

up ‘without a net’. Such experiences were indeed the norm for Crew members – both males and females – who struggled to remain balanced on that tightrope of survival, who knew that one misstep meant the difference between life and death. In her introduction Tea takes what she admits is a ‘romantic’ perspective on growing up working-class when she says “I like to imagine that our lives are dazzling athletic feats, our survival graceful and artistic,” (2003:xiii). Hers is indeed a deliberate attempt to intervene upon the common narrative as Tea notes, “[w]hen poor and working-class people are written about – and usually we are written *about*, rarely telling our own stories – it’s always the tragedy that is documented,” (ibid.).

In many ways, Tea is right, as these tragic stories far too often end up as little more than parlor fare. But in other ways I think that such stories – when properly contextualized and told in individuals own voices – are incredibly important for shedding light on experiences of working-class and poverty-level youth. For, if nothing else, bringing such stories to light means that future omission cannot be explained away by claiming ignorance of this world. Since I am concerned with the absence of class in media, research and policy discourse about youth in general – and queer youth in particular - in this section I strive to produce what Tea calls a “deeper and more complicated” (2003:xiv) discussion about – and *with* – those youth who have survived without a net. For as she notes, in these lives,

There’s tragedy, for sure there’s tragedy, but there are also kick-ass survival skills to be proud of, so many ingenious approaches to surviving poverty – everything from the focused, determined march out from under it via college and hard work to a gleeful, defiant, dumpster-diving exultation in the freedom that can accompany living at the bottom. There is joy in poor people’s lives, and humor and camaraderie. Girls who grow up working-class grow up tough and clever. There is hope in our lives, whether it’s the pure potential of a Lotto ticket and a bingo card, or the

deep faith that things are gonna get better ‘cause they sure as hell can’t get any worse. We know the world is vast and complicated, our responses to our situations are often contradictory, counterintuitive, but we get by. We are all survivors, and have no use for the pity and condescension that often accompany discussions about our lives. Discussion, incidentally, that we’re rarely a part of. (2003:xiv)

So in what you are about to read there is tragedy – tragedy that I believe is important, indeed vital, to include here because it is this shared history of class(ed) experiences and state surveillance and intervention that brought the individual members of the Crew together to form their ‘intentional community’ – one which would act, in part, as the safety net so many of them lacked growing up. But in these narratives – and in the Crew itself – there is also the joy, and faith and humor that Tea draws our attention to, as this is indeed what kept the Crew together.

And there is something else here also – something bigger than the Crew itself. There is a perspective, a perception, a take on the world that the Crew both shared and reproduced in a defiant stance against the state and its institutions. It is not, as I hope to illustrate, an act of ‘rebellion’, as this word - when used in regards to youth – is stripped of its political acumen and reduced to a set of ‘hormonally-driven’ actions devoid of a larger analysis. No, the Crew was never, in my experience, rebellious. Rather they were politically astute, analytically engaged, and rightfully enraged. And that is why they were systematically silenced, subject to surveillance, and shifted out of the public spaces in Hilltown. The physical, political and ideological marginalization of the Crew is a normalized experience for those who come-of-age in the sexual, geographical and economic borderlands, and often determines their exclusion (which is sometimes a *self*-exclusion) from resource-providing groups and programs of the state. But with the support they themselves created, the Crew worked – in ways both big and small – to take

care of each other, to become the safety net they lacked, and to make their own ways in this world that had done it's best to shut them up and keep them down.

Being the 'Factory's Bitch': Crew Experiences in Mainstream Employment

When you grow up 'without a net', as the Crew members did, you learn early and quickly that if you want to eat, or if you want to have a place to sleep at night, you needed to make money – you needed a job. But the job prospects for youth in Hilltown were limited, and so often times Crew members worked odd jobs, or went from job to job, staying at one place for as long as they could stand the often atrocious working conditions. As Stevo described his factory job to Birdie,

I worked at Tofumakers for a little bit. I hated it, it was horrible. 15 hour days. I fell in a vat of soybeans and almost died one time. It is just really bad working conditions...very hostile, very competitive. People don't really talk to you. You just go in and do your job, and if you say anything about doing your job other than 'I can do it 100%' you get yelled at. It's just like you're the factory's bitch.

Being the 'factory's bitch' was a common experience for members of the Crew. Carrie, a petite Crew member who weighed about 90 pounds worked at a box making factory as a machine operator. "It's alright" she told Birdie in an interview, "but the fluorescent lights freak me out because I'm always behind a machine, and I'm working so hard and so fast with my arms that I can see the veins and the blood rushing through them. Yeah, I need to get sunglasses cause it really messes with my head".

But if they weren't lucky enough to find work in a factory (which tended to pay better than other jobs) Crew members worked in the service industry, sometimes at the fast food chains where they made minimum wage and had no opportunity for job growth

and were punished for taking initiative if it wasn't within the regulations of the chain. As Clyde explained to Birdie,

I worked at McDonalds – you know – the downfall of mankind as we know it – and McDonalds has a very strict burger policy where you can only put 18 burgers on the grill. But one day we had a lot of orders and we needed hamburgers so I put 20 burgers on [the grill]. Now, the pimply 16 year old kid who was my 'manager' decided it was within his authority to totally freak out over two hamburgers and I told him to shut the fuck up, and that made the supervisor pissed and [she] sent me home...you know, and I was only working there cause I really desperately needed a job.

After Clyde got fired, he found work as a dishwasher at one of the new local restaurants, and as he said, "now I can't afford to eat at the place that I work" – a story I had heard from the other Crew members employed by these new establishments.

Other Crew members worked for a soft drink megacorporation which had a bottling facility located on the outskirts of Hilltown. Jason, who spent his days refilling soda machines, referred to his job as "riding corporate cock", complained about how he was 'branded' with the soft drink's name on every item of clothing he had to wear ("labels everywhere – even on my ass. I told you dude – corporate cock all over my ass"). But at \$11.75 an hour Jason was willing to be branded, and willing to take the shit he said came with the job (as he told Birdie, "I get treated like shit man. I'm blamed for everything"). Other Crew members involvement with shit wasn't so metaphorical – like Tim whose highest paying job, as he told me, was when "I used to drive the purple poop diaper. It was a big purple truck *full of shit*. I just drove it, that was it, drove it to the waste treatment plant, but," he smirked, "it was a *shitty* job".

Indeed, as Phillippe Bourgois points out in his ethnography of Spanish Harlem, working low-level factory and service jobs he terms "shitwork" (2006:116), is a common experience for youth that characterizes the "silent subtle humiliations that the entry-level

labour market...invariably subjects them to,” (2006:119) and against which the underground economy operates. While the underground economy of Spanish Harlem that Bourgois explores is one of drug dealing, there is different alternative economy afoot in Hilltown – one that the Crew members have themselves created, and one that is central to the groups’ safety net.

The Crew’s Economy: Bartering, Busking, Spanging & Taking Care of Each Other

Barter: (verb) to exchange goods or services in return for other goods or services

Busk: (verb) “when you play music on the street and you put out a case or a hat for money”

Spange: (verb) a combination of the words ‘spare’ and ‘change’, “when you stand on the street and ask people for spare change when they walk by”

Early on in my time with the Crew it became clear that while many of them worked in the mainstream economy, their salaries were insufficient for keeping a roof over their heads and keeping themselves fed. Many of the Crew members busked or spanged, but there was also an alternative economy of bartering and exchange that operated to keep people housed and fed. Indeed, all of the Crew houses I was invited to were communal – there were always at least four people living at any given apartment – and while a few of them were listed on the lease, it was clear that almost all the Crew houses were also ‘crashpads’ for Crew members in between traveling stints or those who had hit rough times and needed to ‘couch surf’ for a while. This was central to the safety net and alternative economy the Crew built, one which I had only partial access to as an adopted insider. But it was Stella – a Crew member I came to build a friendship with – who best

articulated the inner workings of the Crew's financial safety net during a conversation we had about a year after I 'left' the field.

This conversation wasn't really an 'interview' - indeed my fieldwork had long ago ended, and I was hanging out with Stella at my house, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes and making art. Over the course of the day we had many conversations, but when we got into an intense discussion about the Crew and the state of the world, I asked Stella's permission to tape our conversation. I draw directly from the transcript of this impromptu conversation considerably in this chapter, wanting the insider perspective to be told in an insider's voice as much as possible. Here I begin with our discussions about 'making a living' in the Crew, where I had asked Stella about how folks made money. As she explained to me, "a lot of them have odd jobs or behind the scenes jobs. Under the table work, there's a lot of that that goes on. There's also a lot of money borrowing. Money lending...bartering happens a lot, you know? There's also just a lot of helping each other out". I asked her to clarify on this point, and her response illuminates the 'inner workings' of the Crew's alternative economy. As she explains,

It's just sort of this system where some of us have more money than others, some of us have places to live and some of us don't. And plenty of us have like skills that the other ones don't have, so it might be like 'I have an apartment and my friend doesn't. He's gonna come stay at my apartment but he's also gonna build me bookshelves, because I need bookshelves and I got no carpentry skills, and my boy's got carpentry skills'. 'Come live with me', you know? *It's all about taking care of each other, but everyone is taking care of someone in some way, no one's just getting a free ride.* If your not like building bookshelves or whatever, then you better be out scavenging food or something, like you better be doing something, because – that's another thing, if you're just taking a free ride for a long enough time people notice and people are like '??'

Indeed, the Crew took care of each other primarily in this way – a system where everybody contributed and no one got a 'free ride'. And they wouldn't have wanted that

free ride anyway – indeed their system worked to ensure that nobody felt like a ‘charity case’, a position many of them had been put in through their early experiences with the state. In many ways because of their early experiences of growing up without a net, the Crew members had no choice but to take care of themselves; if they didn’t they wouldn’t survive.

Taking care of each other, however, *was* a choice; it is a choice to share what small earnings you have with another person, it is a choice to allow someone else to crash on your couch or to feed them when they can’t feed themselves, and – perhaps most importantly - it is a choice that the Crew members made time and time again. Indeed, as an outsider I was struck by the fierce support that the Crew members provided for one another other. Crucially, this support was not only financial, it was emotional as well.

As Stella told me,

I love that I have those people in my life because if I’m upset about something there are houses I can go to where I can just knock on the door and no one asks me what’s wrong, what happened...it’s just ‘what do you need? What can I do for you to make you not feel bad anymore?’. It’s a pretty amazing group of people. You never have to explain yourself.

This freedom to ‘never have to explain yourself’ was indeed, central to the emotional safety net provided by the Crew. And it was crucial because in their interactions with ‘outsiders’ Crew members were so often put in the position of having to explain themselves to those people who wanted them to buy into the system, those people who wanted to shape and mold Crew members into ‘productive citizens’ and those people who wanted to put Crew members into neat little boxes with affixed (and *fixed*) labels. Largely, I believe, because of their experiences of being branded and labeled and misread

by outsiders the Crew had a very interesting relationship to the politics of identification. Indeed, in many ways this translated into an eschewal of ‘identity’, as I will now explore.

What Holds the Group Together: Non-Identification and The Crew

I had been struggling to make sense of the Crew for some time when Stella and I had our conversation. In particular, I struggled with the lack of ‘identification’ I came to see as rampant among the Crew – indeed, they resisted and refused almost all ‘identity’ labels – and at the time I could not understand why that was. I knew that it wasn’t simply a ‘generational’ question – as indeed during my time at SMAK and also at the Voc High School I had seen other youth cling tightly to identity labels (especially gender and sexuality-based ones) but this was clearly not the case for the Crew, and I wanted to find out why. An excerpt from my conversation with Stella sheds light on this important issue.

KAILA – so there’s like different groups of youth – the kids I know from SMAK and then there’s all the ‘street kids’ that I met, and that whole group [the Crew] they don’t identify

STELLA – no.

KAILA – like, as *anything*, right?

STELLA – no

KAILA - Why? Even like personal identification, they don’t identify as gay or straight

STELLA – oh, no. I mean, I don’t.

KAILA – but why?

STELLA – cause I’m not in any clubs! Like I’m just me, and like how I am – I know what I am, and why would I stress over figuring out some sort of way to identify in order to make it make sense to other people? I mean, we have like words. You know, we’re the Ball Punchers Union, Local 413!! [the area code for Hilltown]

KAILA – so it’s geographic identity?

STELLA - yeah, it’s just...I don’t know, it’s something. I mean, we don’t want to be ‘white’ or ‘straight’ or anything like that. We don’t want to be ‘punk rock’, we don’t listen to fucking GreenDay.

KAILA – so you just don’t identify as anything?

STELLA – no.

KAILA – but isn't there any identifying that happens, because not everyone's allowed into the club?

STELLA – um. If you get along with us, your allowed in the club. And it's also like...you know, you can find something bad about any group, so if you don't belong to any group, you're above ALL the groups. And that's kind of what it's all about. We're kind of above everything.

But it was clear to me that, despite the idea that the Crew was 'above everything', as people on the bottom of the economic ladder they were subject to systematic harassment and surveillance that other groups of youth were not. Indeed, this disparity wasn't lost on members of the Crew, or on Stella, and – as she explained - their awareness of their position in society (their class position, their educational position) was acute, astute, and a central organizing force in creating the community known as the Crew.

STELLA – I mean why do you think we rag on rich kids and college kids?

KAILA – why?

STELLA – *because we couldn't have that if we wanted it*, so making fun of it makes us feel a lot better about the fact that we couldn't have it if we wanted it.

KAILA – ah. So you guys are excluded from all this stuff so why not just exclude yourself?

STELLA – yeah.

KAILA – but then doesn't that just lead to further exclusion?

STELLA – oh yeah, but you know, there's something you should listen to – there's this guy online called Hammell on Trial and he talks about there being safety in numbers and being society's outcast and how they [meaning society] 'have been laughing so long and now we get to laugh back but more in a 'hoo-hoo, what the *fuck* sort of way' and it's like that. It's like...we don't have anything but we have each other. You know? We're all fucked up together.

It's like ... we're the people that have been shit on, who are doing everything that we can to shit back. It's the one thing we all have in common, you know?

Indeed, they also had in common the experience of being (mis)labeled by 'outsiders' and being ascribed identities that they did not hold for themselves. In a focus group discussion Birdie and I led with Crew members, several people noted the mislabeling they were subject to. As one young female Crew member pointed out, "I think it has to

do with age, and how people look for sure. And probably the fact that kids are sitting on the street a lot, which is not a bad thing, but people think it is". At this point a male Crew member interjected, noting, "I think it's more ignorance on people's part. Like, they see a bunch of people sitting in front of the café and they think everyone's shooting heroin. People don't know, so they just assume the worst – *they just lump everyone together as one thing and label it*. Just plain ignorance for sure."

Crew members believed that they were read differently by different people in the community – especially around gender and the often 'ambiguous' dress adopted by this group. Indeed, on the ground the group seemed to operate in many ways outside of 'traditional' gender roles. As Stella explained, "that's another aspect of the whole not identifying in any way [idea], because in that community everyone is equal. There is no 'you're a boy and I'm a girl' it's like 'we're both people and we share clothes and do the same jobs' there's no like [when we're] camping it's not like 'us guys are gonna go find some wood' – it's just not like that." But the same gender-neutral expression that allowed Crew members to eschew traditional gender roles was what marked, especially the males of the Crew, as 'threatening' to outsiders. This was something the Crew took a special pride in and something they 'played with', using people's reactions to them – and their mislabeling of them - as a way to 'fuck with people'. As Birdie explained to me once,

BIRDIE: it's funny, today I was actually talking to this kid Marco, he's got like short hair and glasses, and wears tight pants and like tight jackets and stuff, but he's got a girlfriend. And I would think that he was bi or gay – I don't know how he identifies – but he was talking to me about how people will drive by him and yell 'FAG!' And [in response] he just yells, 'Yeah! I'll fuck your dick and you'll like it too!' You know? [Birdie cracks up] And then Davey was like 'yeah, I get that too you know, people

calling me a fag, and I'm like 'yeah – you wanna date me?' You know, just totally like playing it up.

As I asked her to reflect more on the effects of these identities *ascribed to* - but not adopted by - the Crew, she responded, "I think that everyone feels that it's irrelevant, like, why does it matter what other people ascribe to you? So I think that that's one of the things that a lot of [the Crew] has in common, they feel like it doesn't really matter – people are going to ascribe things to you no matter what you say to them,". In another conversation with Birdie I commented on how the 'image' the group seemed to project was continuously misread by outsiders who would then call them names (from 'hippie' to 'druggie'), or give them 'advice' they thought the Crew needed (from 'get a job' to 'take a shower'). Birdie agreed and noted that the Crew was well aware of that phenomenon. As she said, "I think that everyone in the group knows that and is aware that their image is something other than what it actually is and that's why it doesn't really matter, people can think what they're gonna think". For me, this issue would come to a head around the topic of sexuality - and my own mislabeling and misunderstanding of the Crew and their sexual expressions - while in the field.

Sexuality & The Crew: A Lesson in (Mis)Interpretation

STELLA: So, Asher likes boys. Asher also likes girls, but he's had a lot of bad experiences with boys. I remember one time we talked and he said 'yeah I meet lots of guys I'm attracted to but every guy that I've had some sort of relationship with has been a really big dick'.

KAILA – but he's not like 'I'm bisexual'?

STELLA – no

KAILA – why? Like he would never go to [gay] pride...

STELLA – but then, I would never go to pride either. It's not about being bisexual, I mean my personal feeling is I meet people and some of them I'm attracted to and some of them I'm not and gender has nothing to do with it. It's like that isn't even a factor. So to identify as bisexual would still imply that your gender has something to do with it. And also saying you're bisexual implies that you're attracted to people that identify as

either male or female, and a lot of not identifying as that, at least for me, is about not separating people into groups, like I think that's a really shitty thing that people do.

KAILA – even though you know that's what society does..

STELLA – exactly. And I think that's where a lot a lot a lot of issues come from. Also when you, when I think of myself in terms of 'how do I identify' - cause when I was younger I'd be like 'well I know I like girls sometimes but I don't want to call myself bisexual because I'm also attracted to people who are trans', and [then] there's 'pansexual', but how many people even fucking know what that means? And even that is still like – I feel like it's taking me and putting me into the queer community and how I identify in the queer community, and I could go to some sort of queer function and tell people that I'm pansexual and they'd be like 'oh ok' but where does that put me anywhere else? And I feel I start to lose myself when I start thinking about that stuff too much, and it's just so much easier to know how I identify to myself and not explain it to anybody and say 'that's cool' to people that feel the same way and say 'fuck you' to anybody who thinks I should identify. I don't put myself in any boxes.

Indeed, this was the case with many Crew members – who resisted identity labels even though they may have had a range of sexual experiences. I learned this first hand one day when I was hanging out in front of the Café with some Crew members including Mikey, who was resting up against the brickwall while he braided Petunia's (Shine and Dougies' seven year old sister) hair. As he said, "I can French braid like a *mofó*...I should be gay. I'd make the perfect fucking hairdresser". In response, Miranda, one of the Crew girls, said in a teasing tone, "but *aren't* you gay Mikey?" He didn't miss a beat in responding "I am *always* happy ok," to which everyone cracked up, "doesn't make me homosexual." He continued – straight faced – "and just cause I have sex with men doesn't either!". Indeed, several of the Crew boys, I found out, had sex with other boys. The only time I ever heard about any tension in the Crew related to same-sex sexual expression or experiences was in a situation when there were whispers about whether the sexual encounter between two Crew men had been consensual.

The tension surrounding this event actually came to a head at a Crew party I was present at - an Octoberfest party at Zoe's apartment down in Hilltown Glen (the Section 8 housing 'projects'). While a bunch of bands played inside, I stood among about twenty youth scattered on the front 'lawn' (or the small patch of dead grass and weeds that passed for a lawn in the Glen), smoking cigarettes and watching people come and go from the party. Milo, a Crew male I had spent some time with, was standing about ten feet away from me, talking to his cousin Kerry and sipping from his 40 ounce malt liquor bottle. Suddenly I felt someone rush by me and I looked up just in time to see Devin - another Crew male - run up to Milo, push him to the ground, straddle him and spit in his face. Devin began punching Milo while yelling 'you raped my friend!'. This all happened so fast, and while I stood there drop jawed and confused and scared (as I had never in my life witnessed a fight), Kerry and a few other Crew members acted quickly and got in between Devin and Milo, who were now rolling on the ground and punching each other. As they pulled Devin off he yelled again 'you raped my friend!' and Milo responded, clutching his hand to his bleeding mouth, 'yeah - after he stuck his dick in my ass I raped him. *Right!*'. At this moment several crew members pushed and pulled Devin into the house while others came over to see if Milo was okay (and to stop him from going into the house after Devin). This 'division of labor' wasn't about 'taking sides' in the issue - as I would find out later in discussions about the event - but rather the Crew's concern was to end the fight and separate the two of them as quickly as possible.

Later that night I relayed the event to Birdie (who was inside the house party at the time) and I told her how I had been so shocked by the fight - how quickly it all

happened, how intense it was - that while it was happening I couldn't move - I just stood dead still, and it was over before I knew it. But the other thing I relayed to Birdie was my mixed reaction to the fight right after it transpired. Indeed, as I stood on the lawn and watched the Crew disperse in the aftermath of the fight I had this sudden (but ultimately *wrong*) realization that what I had witnessed had been a fight about sex and sexuality and that was important to "The Research". And then immediately I felt repulsed, disgusted at my 'academic' interest, as I told Birdie, "and then I had this moment where I felt gross as a researcher because I was interested in something that, *as a person*, I wished wasn't happening". Indeed, I knew both Milo and Devin personally, and it was terrible – I thought – to be interested in the theoretical implications of this real, and *bad*, event transpiring between two people I knew and cared for. At the time I remember thinking 'I will *never* write about this' because I couldn't bear the implications (for both the Crew, but more honestly, for *myself*). The reason that I do write about this event is because not only was my response as a researcher 'scuzzy' (as Birdie would say), but because it was also *wrong*.

In fact, as I would come to discover, this fight wasn't a confrontation about *sexuality* – it was a confrontation about *consent* – and this is a crucial distinction. Indeed, as I spent more time with the Crew and was privy to more of the internal dissensions and issues I heard about a similar event that transpired when the same questions regarding consent were raised about a sexual encounter between a male and female Crew member. In and through these discussions I came to understand that the fight I had witnessed was not about Crew members policing 'queer' sexuality, but rather it was about Crew members protecting one another and ensuring that nobody – regardless of gender – was

taken advantage of. It didn't matter if it was sex between two boys, sex between two girls, or sex between a boy and a girl – what the Crew members cared about was maintaining equality among the group and watching out for each other. Indeed, the Crew members were *fiercely* concerned with the 'rights' and wellbeing of one another – in part, I believe, because no one else 'had their backs' – not their parents, not adults in the community, and certainly not the policemen who were supposed to ensure that everyone got treated fairly. Indeed, fair – or even *reasonable* – treatment by 'the authorities' was never expected by the Crew, for good reason as I came to find out.

“Under What Pretense”: An Introduction to Cop and Crew Interactions

During my conversation with Stella about the Crew we soon found ourselves discussing the relationships between the Crew and the cops. I asked her, “so how [does the Crew] feel about cops?” To which she laughed and exclaimed “oh god!”. I asked her if their reaction to police was because Crew members had been themselves personally persecuted by them, to which she responded, “yeah. Dude – you can get arrested for not doing anything wrong and then get beat up by the cops. I have friends who've been arrested – *seriously* – for walking down the street”. And I – the naïve and privileged anthropologist – was shocked. “Under what pretense?” I asked, to which Stella looked at me like I had three heads and said very slowly (to make sure I understood) “*there doesn't need to be one*. All the cops need to do is put a bag of weed in a kids backpack and they're all set and then they can bring them back to the police station and beat them up for a couple of hours before his friends scrounge up enough money to come and bail him out”. “And that happens?” I exclaimed, “like really?”. At this point Stella actually said the word

“duh” to me. I asked her if there’s ever any kind of resistance to this within the Crew.

As she told me,

There’s a lot of talk. But like...again, they feel like no one’s going to take them seriously. These are people that have dreadlocks and tattoos and piercings and they don’t take showers and they don’t change their clothes and for them to be like ‘this cop fucked with me’ people are gonna be like ‘oh, I’m *sure* you did something wrong’. You know? ‘You look like trouble’, ‘You just have this aura of wrongness about you, like, you must have done something wrong’.

In response to this I asked Stella if she thought there would be adults in the community upset to know that that is happening. She looked at me, with something like pity for this obviously naïve researcher and said “um...yeah, there might be like 5 of them”. But I – I was truly shocked to learn about this type of harassment and misconduct. I had seen small run-ins between the Cops and the Crew – like the incident with Jayke and the bench – but this was something entirely different. As I began to ask other Crew members about this, I heard more and more tales of something that wasn’t right. I wanted to help – to give back in some way – and so Birdie and I ran an anonymous ‘town hall’ type of meeting for the youth, which offered a night of “free pizza and bitching” at Java, where folks could come and talk about their experiences with harassment. It was an important conversation – and a timely one as well – as recently the town had started to remove the benches that had caused so much contention, and were looking to enact new regulations about gatherings in public spaces. During this conversation I learned more than I could ever imagine about the interactions between the Crew and the cops and I also witnessed the youth reflecting upon their position – and heard, for the first time, their take on the outside world – giving me a glimpse of the ‘insider looking out’ perspective, and examples of the insightful understandings of these mistreated individuals.

Big Brother Is Watching You(th): The Crew & Police Surveillance/Harrassment

In the week leading up to the discussion group we were leading, Birdie and I passed out pocket-sized fliers on the streets of Hilltown. On them was an image we downloaded from the internet, a drawing of a man's face surrounded by the words "Big Brother Is Watching YOU" (to which we added – in Sharpie ink – the letters 'th' so that it read Big Brother Is Watching YOUTH). Under that we wrote the following – "Ever been harassed? Ever been arrested? Worried that you will be? Free Pizza and bitching with us @ Java – Thursday 6pm". We arranged to use this space with the owner, and we got a very good turn out which included nearly 20 youth, myself and Birdie and also two adults – one of whom ran a youth group in the community, and another who spent time with this group of youth. At the meeting, unsurprisingly, the adults would come to dominate the conversation, and Birdie and I worked hard to try to have them take a back seat so that the youth could have the floor. We talked about a lot of things in this meeting including the 'new face' of Hilltown – something I'll address in a following section. What I want to focus on here, however, were the stories having to do with police interactions. In particular, I include here a long story told by one of the Crew females (I use no names in this section – not even pseudonyms, in honor of the confidentiality promised to all participants). I had asked the participants how many of them had been to parties that got 'busted' (to which they all raised their hand). One young woman recalled a house party she and other Crew members hosted, which the cops busted. I include her passage in full here, as her story is crucial and reveals many important aspects of the cop/Crew interactions in Hilltown.

Like I live in a house and all of our friends play music so we would have basement shows...and we had a concert on Sunday night and we didn't

realize it was as loud [as it was]. But we figured worst case scenario they [the police] would come to the door – and not come in – and tell us to quiet down because that's what's supposed to happen. But they [the police] showed up with 3 or 4 police officers, they were at all of our doors, and they said there was a noise complaint. I said 'sorry we'll turn it down' and they were like 'well, we see a lot of people in there, are any of them underage?' and I said 'there are people here who are underage but they all have black X's on their hands, and none of them are drinking'. And the cops decide they're gonna come into the house because some people we didn't know were out front and they had a bag of pot and they gave it to the cops cause [these kids] were from out of town so they didn't really care, and they didn't know their rights. So, me and my other two roommates all told the police officers they didn't have the right to enter our house - and they told us they didn't need our permission. And they came into our house, walked around and checked people's id's and kinda harassed everyone. Then they took us outside and told us all they were arresting us and charging us with 'disorderly conduct', 'disturbing the peace', 'keeping a disorderly household' and 'contributing to the delinquency of minors'. And also because we had two unregistered vehicles on the property they were charging us with that as well - all five of the people who live in the house. And they then found a warrant, which turned out to not really exist, for one of the people who was with us, [and they] arrested him, took him to jail and told him they were going to 'stick their fists up his ass' to make sure he didn't have any drugs on him. And they called him a faggot, and seriously harassed him. And we bailed him out. And then the next day at court they were like 'oh it was some sort of miscommunication, you didn't really have a warrant, it was uh...an accident...it was in the system wrong' because he had already been arrested for it, and paid the fine. And they ended up not charging us [either] cause I went a couple of nights later to pick up a friend of mine who had had a little too much to drink and was sleeping on the Ave, and so I went to pick him up at the police station and they told me that none of us [who lived at the house they busted the party at] were getting charged because I was 'so nice'. And when I went in [to the station] I had to sign a piece of paper to take [my friend] home and I had five police officers standing around me, their thumbs in their belt loops like this [mimes making a triangle towards their crotch, and sticking it out] like looking at me, and when I left the creepy cop winked at me, and it freaked me out. And I've had - since then - the cops following my car around town. Everytime I'm out here they're like slowly driving by. They're outside of my house all the time, always driving around. And they said that the reason they busted us afterwards was not even a noise complaint it was because we had cars on the road. There weren't any cars on the road. The next week it was the fourth of July and all three of our neighbors had giant parties where they were parked on the sidewalk, parked in front of fire

hydrants, and the parties were really loud and went really late. But they were fine, because they're old, and the cops didn't come.

After she told this story another female Crew member remarked "yeah, the way [the arrested Crew member] got treated during that was just *unreal*". Another responded, "oh yeah – and in a normal situation like the police would – *had it not been us* – they would have just come [to the house] and said 'hey shut up and move the cars'." The girl who told the story continued, "yeah, they told [the arrested Crew member] that they had been watching us, and that they had just been waiting – *waiting* – to come to our house". A male Crew member then noted, "yeah, and that kid that gave them the pot – that gives them probable cause and intent" to which the storyteller said, "yeah, well that's because people don't know their rights". So I asked the group about their knowledge of their rights.

KAILA – do you guys feel like you know what your rights are in these different situations?

CREW FEMALE – I do

CREW MALE – if you do your at a huge advantage. But if your not 100 percent sure the cops will push it and start dropping big terms like 'facilitating delinquency'

CREW FEMALE 1 – when the cops came to me and charged me, [with] every single charge they read I was like 'you need to explain that to me completely - completely explain that to me in terms that I understand cause we're not going any further until you do'.

CREW MALE - right and then they'll also take that as you being hostile or resisting...

KAILA – so knowing your rights is hostile? [people nod] So those of you who know your rights, how do you know them, is it people telling you, or

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CREW FEMALE – from the internet

CREW MALE – actually in my old house and in my car and in my wallet – I had the card for every single right you have. [In my wallet] I had 'if your stopped on the street', on the door of my old house was [the list of] what they're allowed to come into your house for. In my car was why they were allowed to search your car. [I had those lists] at all times and places.

CREW FEMALE – there are a lot of places that distribute that information too, like a lot of zines that get it out because they want people to know that.

KAILA – well on the flip side have there been instances where you felt like the cops or adults around here have been really helpful to you?

CREW FEMALE - no

CREW FEMALE - no

CREW MALE – no one ever helped me.

CREW MALE – well, one cop gave me a ride once.

[Silence]

CREW FEMALE – I wish they would police all of the drunken old men who hit on me when I walk down the street at night and say vulgar things to me. I think that would be a better thing to start policing.

Indeed, the Crew not only had some ideas for what the police should be doing in the community, they also had an astute analysis of the changes that had come to Hilltown, and the economic situation they found themselves in. Both at this focus group discussion, and in interviews Birdie and I conducted, Crew members expressed important but often silenced perspectives on their community. I turn now to an exploration of these ideas, and will then illuminate the political outlooks the youth had which not only explained their reactions to both their small community as well as the world at large.

Crew Members Talk Back: The Insiders Look Outwards At The ‘New’ Hilltown

In the last three years there’s been this major gentrification. [Hilltown] has always been a beautiful town, just because people who have money now think it’s beautiful doesn’t mean it wasn’t beautiful ten years ago. Now all these people are moving into town and everyone tries to act like gentrification isn’t moving out the lower class, but it really is. [Male Crew Member]

Over and over in our interviews with Crew members, Birdie and I heard people’s reactions to the changes that had recently come to Hilltown. While their individual explanations and descriptions of these changes differed, all the Crew members raised concerns about the changes to their community, and what it would mean for them. In her interview with Stevo, Birdie raised this issue, telling Stevo “I want to talk about the changing face of [Hilltown]”. She got an interesting, and thought provoking response,

STEVO – oh! You mean how it’s getting more artsy?

BIRDIE – yeah

STEVO – yeah. That’s *not* really happening.

BIRDIE – no?

STEVO – No. See [Hilltown] isn’t changing at all

BIRDIE – alright

STEVO – in fact, it hasn’t changed for the past 10 years. It’s completely the same. There’s always been kids hanging on the Ave – not the same ones, it’s a different generation now....And people are saying ‘oh there’s all this money’s coming into town and the institutes really getting bigger’ and that’s true, that’s true, there’s more money coming into town. But if there’s any change going on, it’s not getting more artsy – *the art’s always been there* – it’s just people are trying to exploit it. And there’s a lot of people who want to make a lot of money so they’re opening these fancy restaurants like Il Boca –

BIRDIE – yeah, the weird thing about Il Boca for me is that it’s in downtown [Hilltown] with all it’s crack and it’s heroin and then there’s this wicked fancy expensive restaurant...I’m wondering what Nob Hill [the new bar slated to open in Hilltown] is gonna be like also

STEVO – oh, you mean *Snob Hill* [what many of the Crew members referred to it as]. Well it’s probably going to be horrible....it’s going to bring in all these people who think that they’re better than everybody else cause they’re at this hip new trendy San Francisco-themed bar. It’s pretty much the crowd from [Universityville] that I hate. It’s the reason I don’t go to [Universityville]. They’re these horribly stuck up trendy people who have lots of money because their parents own businesses...

Indeed, the Crew members seemed both well aware of the changes that were happening in Hilltown, and the ramifications that would have in this predominately working-class community. This means that they were not only well aware of the class(ed) nature of Hilltown, but they were also ‘onto’ the economic invasion of their community by outsiders. Indeed, in their interview Birdie asked Stevo to describe what Hilltown is like “in terms of class”. He responded,

STEVO – it’s poor people. It’s all really poor people and really rich people, there’s no downtown middle class at all. I haven’t seen anybody middle class downtown ever. It’s just really poor and really rich.

BIRDIE – so what is the divide like...how is there such a huge class divide?

STEVO – well, there’s the people who own buildings and who own businesses who live downtown and then there’s the people who work in the factories and work at the businesses that the people who live

downtown own. And then there's the people who don't have any money and live downtown. At the Cutlery Block – no one there has jobs. It's like section 8, all of it.

In our focus group discussion I asked about the changes to Hilltown and the new group of people that were moving into this community. They responded,

CREW MALE – [they're] just people that are a little more wealthy

CREW MALE – people from out of town that see it more as an investment opportunity

CREW FEMALE – yeah and they come and buy up stuff

CREW MALE – or they push people out

KAILA – how do you mean?

CREW MALE – [the old owner of the bar that was sold and turned into Nob Hill] they drove that guy out!

CREW FEMALE – yeah 'someone' mysteriously called in a bunch of noise complaints till it got shut down, then he bought it [one Crew member 'outs' this mysterious caller by name, and they all laugh]

Indeed, the people who had moved to Hilltown and started buying up properties and opening new restaurants, cafes and bars, were not anonymous. The Crew knew their names and faces, and they believed they also knew what these outsiders had planned for this community. As Stevo told Birdie,

well if all goes as planned and Andy Pullman goes and opens this new bar and makes a lot of money and buys up the whole block and Rob – who owns the The Horse's Mouth puts condos in the VFW and buys Billy's Place and stuff – *no one who lives in this town is going to be able to live here anymore*. All the poor people are gonna get drove out by all these richer people. The upperclassmen are gonna drive us out because our town's nice and they want it. *But once they come and live in our nice town, it's not gonna be nice anymore*.

Indeed, this economic 'invasion' was already evident, and many of the Crew members had already experienced the outfall. When I asked at our focus group if people had seen the housing situation change, they responded,

CREW MALE – absolutely! A year and a half ago I paid 650 for a two bedroom apartment with heat and hot water and like now I'm seeing shitty one bedrooms for 800.

CREW FEMALE – it's unbelievable

CREW MALE – one person jacks up the rent up, and everyone falls suit

CREW FEMALE – rent goes up and then you have to rely on living with friends

Indeed, many of the Crew now found themselves couchsurfing, or even ‘camping’ outside, down by the river. Not only had they been pushed out of their apartments, they were also pushed off the streets as the cops cracked down on ‘loitering’. Indeed over the course of my research, the Café that had once been the central meeting spot for the Crew changed drastically. As a female Crew member noted in our focus group, “first they took out the seats and then they took away the trashcan so people couldn’t put their butts in there, and then ‘no loitering’ signs”. When I asked why that happened, the Crew pointed to the fears adults have about this group of youth.

CREW FEMALE – people have mentioned, like adults in [Hilltown], even Christoph the owner of the Cafe was like ‘I wish people wouldn’t hang out here, everyone’s scared and crosses the street just so they don’t have to walk through that group of people’. *That* group of people.

CREW FEMALE – people are intimidated

CREW FEMALE – yeah, some people don’t even come between us cause they’re afraid, they’ll go down the alley just so they can cross

KAILA – so people would rather walk down an alleyway than walk through you guys

CREW FEMALE – yeah

KAILA – why is that, cause you all don’t look very scary

CREW FEMALE – again, it’s ignorance and because of our appearance and people don’t know any better.

While the Crew members were frustrated by this chain of events, they also seemed to understand the complexities at play in the ‘new’ Hilltown and the ways in which their presence raised anxieties in the community. During our focus group I asked the Crew about this and their response illustrated an acute understanding of their positionality.

KAILA - why do you think people are afraid...have there been incidents that a fear is warranted?

CREW MALE – I don’t think so. It’s a fear of numbers probably

CREW FEMALE – yeah cause we’re a big group and we’re lined up and we’re smoking cigarettes and we’re drinking our stuff. I mean, we’re not

doing anything but people – they don't know. I mean, we're pretty much nice to everybody.

CREW FEMALE – it's weird because it's like, if there's some kind of *institution* that has youth congregating like...sports teams you don't like drive by a baseball field of teenagers and be like (gasp!)

CREW FEMALE – so that's an interesting part too – like we're *choosing* to be here on our own, no one is putting us here.

Here the Crew members drew my attention to a very important aspect of the debates over the space they inhabited – and the distinctions between community reactions to youth enrolled in the institutions of adolescence versus reactions to youth who created their own public 'hangouts' in which, as they emphasized, they *chose* to congregate.

In the next chapter I turn to a discussion of the disjuncture between institutions of adolescence and youth created space as this raises critical policy-relevant questions about queer youth involved in helping organizations (such as SMAK or the GSA) and those who resist and refuse to take part in the state-based architecture of assistance. As I will illustrate, participating or 'opting out' of these services is tied to youth's political perspectives and futures they envision for themselves.

CHAPTER 7

RULING YOUTH: SPACE, PLACE AND POLICY

On the one hand, a range of ‘authorities’ in wider society invent and implement rules for the spatial ordering of the population in terms of age. So teenagers are not allowed into children’s playgrounds...or into certain clubs, drinking places and cinemas...Such rules have a number of evident rationales – the protection of toddlers...or the protection of teenagers themselves from contact with influences they are deemed not yet sufficiently mature to cope with. **Even such ‘ordinary’ rules are bound up with assumptions about identity and attempts to construct socially acceptable identities. And indeed the very drawing of age lines and the definition of the spaces where particular age groups are allowed, is part of the process of defining an age group in the first place. The control of spatiality is part of the process of defining the social category of ‘youth’ itself.** [Skelton, 1997:127 - emphasis added]

In the first part of this chapter I will explore the interactions (or the lack thereof) between youth in Hilltown and the policy-created groups which act as their ‘architecture of assistance’. I pay special attention to the issue of space and explore the reasoning behind – and futures offered – those who ‘opt out’ of these services and programs. I begin here by discussing the Crew’s use of space and the policing they were subject to as it raises important questions regarding those who participate in state-sanctioned institutions of adolescence (like the high school or the community-based group) versus those who “choose” to inhabit primarily self-created spaces on the streets – and the cultural margins - of Hilltown. This is important to attend to, for while “[t]he history of youth culture, whether that be spectacular sub-cultures or more ordinary and conformist practices, has always had an element of making space for oneself, of creating a turf and finding one’s place, often on the margins of society,” (1997:329) as Ruddick notes, “the role of space has been treated as almost incidental by cultural theorists – a by-product of acts of resistance” (1997:342).

Space and Place: Institutions of Adolescence Versus The Hangout

[H]angouts are created from negative space, what adults think of as unplanned, underutilized or “vacant” areas. Teenagers have no resources to build anything for themselves, so they claim the leftovers in the planned landscape. This act of claiming is socially important, a group choice that reinforces membership and autonomy. Places that are planned for them, such as “teen centers” are often shunned, implying as they do someone else’s schedule, someone else’s limited palette of planned activities, someone else’s power of creation. Kids simply want places to be with friends, away from adult-defined roles; the more that they can create these places themselves, the more they appreciate them. [Childress, 2000:107]

Yet adult antagonism toward these self-created spaces of youth is accentuated during times of gentrification of the sort Hilltown was experiencing during my research. Herb Childress notes that a common adult response in such situations is to push youth to use demarcated ‘teen zones’, like youth centers, which purport to offer youth hangout spaces. Yet in reality, this shows not concern for youth but rather serves as assurance – and insurance – for adults. As Childress states, “we insist, again and always, on segregating teenagers into ‘their own’ places, not for their comfort but for ours” (2000:248).¹⁷³ And Hilltown was no exception.

Indeed despite its placement in a county with a dearth of material resources, Hilltown actually had a number of designated youth centers. These included Hilltown Youth Services (HYS), which ran both SMAK and a number of other identity-based youth groups in Hilltown South; KidsMALL (Music, Arts, Literacy and Learning) in Hilltown North which ran a number of looser, interest-based programs (including music and art classes); and TeenSpace located on the periphery of Hilltown which offered a computer lab, a game room, and a concert room for open mics and band performances. While some (often younger) youth in Hilltown utilized these services and (sometimes)

¹⁷³ For Childress this means the “separation of kids and adults, removing teenagers from the community and placing them into the hands of appointed experts,” (2000:218).

congregated with their friends at these programs, the Crew members were strikingly absent from these institutions. For reasons that would become obvious to me, youth Crew members preferred to spend time in self-created ‘hangouts’ that had the least amount of adult supervision and surveillance.¹⁷⁴

While the sidewalk seems an unlikely place in which to congregate, it actually contained one of the key elements of ‘the hangout’, as Herb Childress explains, in that it brings “people together in a way that allows the gathering to seem accidental, and it has to allow for easy escape,” (2000:109). Indeed, in his ethnography on youth and space in a rural Northern California town, Childress notes the importance of ‘the Quad’ – the open space in the high school as, “a natural habitat that let kids search for friends without having to make verbal agreements on where and when they should meet – they simply knew that friends would be there,” (2000:109). In this way the sidewalk in front of The Café, and later in front of Java, operated in the same fashion and served a similar purpose. As Childress notes in relation to the Quad, “the fact that [this group] met hundreds of times at exactly the same nondescript chunk of pavement was clearly no accident, but it maintained the necessary illusion of accident,” (2000:109). This illusion was also central to the Crew’s demarcated hangout on the sidewalks of Hilltown. But why? Because as Childress notes, “it’s terrifically uncool to admit that, to say, ‘I need human contact’,” (2000:107), so the sidewalk hangout worked for the Crew because, “it brought them together in way that was seemingly beyond their control, and allowed them to gather without having to make an admission of emotional need,” (ibid.).

¹⁷⁴ Adults also prefer to congregate in spaces where they are allowed the most freedom, but as adults they have the material resources and cultural capital needed to create these places.

This emotional need is, indeed, a central part of human life – for youth *and* adults alike. While we are culturally invested in the myth of ‘peer influence’, the idea that teenagers are more invested in a ‘clique’ and less able to make autonomous choices or move independently outside of that social group and setting, Herb Childress argues that adults have many of the same tendencies. He notes, that “we [adults] do the same thing with churches and political parties: we gather together to reassure ourselves and each another that we have a community that thinks somewhat like we do, that other people believe that our life goals are both sensible and attainable,” (2000:107). This is, indeed, exactly how the Crew operated as well and this was made possible by the spaces they came to inhabit.

Indeed, unlike both SMAK and the GSA (which were conceptualized by policy makers as one thing, but used by the youth in a variety of agentive ways) I came to see that the Crew’s hangout was similar to what sociologist Ray Oldenburg calls the “great good place” (1997:XVII) or the “third place”¹⁷⁵ (ibid.) which acts as a neutral ground for impromptu gatherings and – ultimately - community building. And what did the Crew do in this ‘great good place’? Sometimes they played music, most times they smoked enough cigarettes to keep the entire tobacco industry afloat, but every time I was around what they did the most of was *talk*¹⁷⁶. They talked about nothing and everything, about

¹⁷⁵ Such spaces, he argues, are critical to the neighborhood. As Oldenburg notes, “there must be places where individuals may come and go as they please, in which none are required to play host, and in which all feel at home and comfortable...Where neutral ground is available it makes possible far more informal, even intimate, relations among people than could be entertained in the home,” (1997:22).

¹⁷⁶ And they talk intimately, as Childress notes, “teenagers are often thought of as unruly and boisterous, but watch a group in conversation at a mall or a park sometime. They stand much closer together than adults; a group of eight teenagers takes up as much space

the little things and the big things, about jobs and relationships, bosses and teachers, parents and children, about *the world*. For Crew members these ‘third places’ were crucial for social engagement and interaction, in part because of the ambiguity of ‘the home’¹⁷⁷. Indeed, the idea that even a well-functioning home “is an ambivalent place” (Childress, 2000:157) for many youth takes on heightened significance for this particular group of youth, many of whom had been kicked out of the parental home and thus faced strained family relations. For most of the Crew members, the lack of material and emotional support from their family played a key role in their membership into this group.

Indeed, the more I got to know the Crew, the more I witnessed how it functioned like a family (or a ‘gang’ - though due to the obvious negative implications of that term I am hesitant to label them as such). This is not unique to this group, rather it is a central component in Oldenburg’s conceptualization of the social relations in the third place. As he notes, “third place regulars ‘do for one another,’ as they would for blood relatives and old friends. They give things they no longer need; they loan items they still want; they do what they can to relieve hardship when it befalls ‘one of the gang.’ When someone doesn’t ‘show’ for a couple of days, somebody goes around to check on them,” (1997:XXI). Indeed, in many ways the Crew functioned as the family, the sidewalk as the dinner table so many of them lacked at home. And regardless of where they slept at

as four or five adults. For the most part, their conversations are quiet and internally directed,” (1993:3).

¹⁷⁷ Childress notes that that “home is a particularly favored environment among adults, the place where they go to regain some control over their lives, to live at their own pace with their own belongings around them,” (2000:157). In contrast, “teenagers in their homes are surrounded by things they didn’t buy, organized in a way that they didn’t design, tied together by a schedule that they didn’t determine,” (ibid.).

night (for some on a mattress on the floor of a shared apartment, for some on a couch in a generous friend's living room, and for others in a tent – or simply a sleeping bag – down by the river) they could always find a friend to hang out and smoke a cigarette with on the sidewalk by the Cafe. But as this group was pushed off of the sidewalk, they had to find other places to 'hangout'. When I asked Dougie where the Crew congregated after all the 'no loitering' signs were hung in the Café window, he simply said, "the river".

Parties by the river, hanging at the river, playing music at the river – these were common occurrences in the lives of the Crew. 'The river' didn't refer so much to the actual body of water as to the grounds surrounding it – a patch of woods and flat rock that provided plenty of 'seats' and places to hold a campfire, smoke some pot and play some music. (Once somebody did go swimming there at night – a story told so often that its frequency spoke volumes about how rare an act it was.) It was also a place I was never brought to – and this was no accident. While I did go to the 'satellite' woods locations where folks did many of the same activities (and many of us also swam) 'the river' remained strictly off-limits, though no one ever said as much. I was, on one occasion casually invited to a 'fire by the river', but when I asked directions they were vague - as indeed it is difficult to give directions to a particular spot in 'the woods' that is accessible only on foot. That one couldn't really tell someone how to get there was no accident, it meant that the only way you could get there was if you were brought by someone else. This insured that only the people the Crew really wanted to be there would actually get there, and since no one offered to bring me there themselves I didn't push it. Rather, I viewed the invitation as a kind gesture to which I was *supposed* to decline, and I did.

Later though, the impenetrableness of this fortress by the river was broken by cops who began ‘raiding’ the woods with some regularity, destroying campsites of ‘squatters’ and in some cases also destroying their property. Sleeping in the woods – an innocuous act and also a last resort for many of the Crew– was also illegal. It was called ‘urban camping’ and if you were caught doing it you faced a fine considerably more expensive than the cost of a cheap motel. At any rate, how the cops found the river was anybody’s guess though they either stumbled upon it out of sheer luck, or were led to the place by someone who needed to be in the good graces of a police officer. But until the raids began, ‘the river’ afforded all the privacy needed for illegal activities (be it drugs or simply sleeping outside) though its seclusion away from the tending gaze of the Crew eventually led to the taking of two young lives – one who overdosed alone in his tent, a second who was beaten to death (by a different group of youth) where no one could hear his screams. In comparison, the guitar playing and cigarette smoking on Main Street seem like rather minor, and tolerable, annoyances.

Still, some members of the community in Hilltown clearly wanted to get ‘rid’ of the Crew – or at least make them invisible – and that had important implications for youth/adult interactions that was not lost on the Crew. Indeed, this was commented upon during our focus group by one of the Crew females who said,

I think if every once in a while an adult would just walk down the street and just sit down and be like ‘hi, how are you doing’ maybe someone else across the street will be like ‘oh that person’s not scared of those kids, maybe I shouldn’t be scared either’. Adults *should* have an interest in youth in their community, because there is endless possibilities of things we could all do if people were there to help support us!

This particular comment struck a chord with me because in my policy and academic life I had heard so many adults complain about the lack of youth participation in their

communities, but I had yet to see adults interact with youth outside the confines and structures of adolescent institutions (be it the high school or the community group). Indeed in my research the irony of adults who complain about any congregations of teens on street corners, hang ‘no loitering’ signs in their business windows and simultaneously bemoan the lack of youth ‘involvement’ in the community was not lost on me.

In fact in Hilltown there was no lack of community-based organizations that tried to enroll youth into programs and practices conceptualized as both engaging youth *in* the community (i.e. creating invested ‘citizens’) and also putting youth to work *for* the community (as youth often provide the ‘cheap’ – or more realistically free – labor for these organizations). That the Crew members refused to participate in these programs is an important issue to address because it speaks to their negotiations with ‘the state’, as I will describe further in the chapter. But here I want to address the assumption that because the Crew did not engage with community-based groups they were not involved in their community. Indeed, as ethnographer Herb Childress explains, “hangouts are truly community-based...Hanging out [in these local places] is a way of saying that community does matter, that one’s hometown is a source of identity,” (1993:5). In this conceptualization, the debate over the Crew’s ‘hangout’ raises important questions about community belonging and engagement – and threatens to expose the underlying ideologies at work in Hilltown’s attempt to rid itself of the Crew.

During my research I kept an ear tuned to both the community discussion about ‘teenagers’ in Hilltown, as well as the larger cultural discourses about teenagers in general. As I walked the streets of Hilltown, sat in its cafes, ate in its restaurants and spent time in its schools, community-based organizations and youth-serving centers, I

(over)heard many variations on the theme of ‘these teens don’t care’: ‘they don’t care about what’s happening to their community’, ‘they don’t care about their futures’, and ‘they certainly don’t give a shit about what’s happening in the world in which they live’. ‘They’re apathetic, they don’t vote, and they don’t contribute anything meaningful’. But my time with the Crew taught me that this couldn’t be further from the truth. Indeed, the discussions with Crew members I was privileged to be a part of over coffee and smokes in front of the Café or Java were – by far – some of the most intense, engaged, and political debates I have ever engaged in (and this after nearly a decade in graduate school). I learned a lot during those talks – about the environment, about big corporations, about the educational system, about the service sector, about *the man*¹⁷⁸, and most importantly, I learned first-hand that these youth are *absolutely* interested in and engaged with the world around them¹⁷⁹. However, the most important thing I learned in these discussions with the Crew members is that they were also well aware of what the world – and their local community - thinks about them. And *that* was the problem.

In his article on the issue of the ‘teen hangout’ in small communities, Herb Childress asks community members to consider the impact of policing teen hangouts and the messages such policing conveys to the youth in the community. As he asks

¹⁷⁸ In their social and political positions the ‘Crew’ reminded me of the group known as ‘the stoners’ in Childress’s ethnography. As he describes them, “The Stoners were more deeply cynical than any other group of kids, assured that schools and government at every level were wholly corrupt (“drug busts for the users, but the rich Republicans who import cocaine and heroin never get busted,” as Tami put it). They were young and weary, left with no resources but one another. They clung tightly to their group, without much to offer each other except the occasional cigarette or quarter and a sense that they weren’t alone,” (2000:149). The astute political sensibilities of this group are taken up in a following section.

¹⁷⁹ Indeed, I argue that we as a society are invested in thinking about youth as politically apathetic and civically unengaged because we are actually threatened by the perspectives many of these youth have.

pointedly, “do we want to keep these teens visible and in town or drive them away, tell them that their group shouldn’t exist at all? *Which is more likely to make them feel like potential participants and contributors to the community?*” (1993:5 – my emphasis). In Hilltown, the answers to these questions were already evident – to community members, to Crew members, and even to me. In contrast to the liberal discourses which emphasize how one person can make a difference in the world, a lifetime of hostile experiences with family members, police, program coordinators, teachers and counselors had taught the Crew exactly what kind of potential contribution they could make to a society that had already made it quite clear that this group was disposable, dispensable, and ‘disaffected’. Indeed, their awareness of these messages created an ideological perspective about ‘the world’ that would ultimately make it impossible for the Crew to engage in the local architecture of assistance. I turn now to a brief discussion of the Crew’s take on the world around them and the possibilities for change (or – more realistically - the lack thereof) which the Crew envisioned.

‘Fuck Bono’: ‘Disaffected’ Youth and Political (In)Action

As previously noted, Crew members were subject to a variety of labels beyond that of ‘disaffected’. Indeed, the label I heard most often by teachers, business owners and passersby when referencing the Crew was “hippie”. While many outsiders to this group (mis)read the Crew’s stylistic markers of dreadlocks, tattoos, piercings and ‘unkempt’ dress as “hippie” *none* of the Crew self-identified in this way. As explored in my conversation with Stella, the “hippie” label was rejected by this group of youth because it

denoted a naïve and idealistic perspective about the world – one which Crew members never had the luxury of possessing.

KAILA – a lot of those kids, people look at them and call them hippies.

But none of them identify as hippies

STELLA – oh god (no)

KAILA – why?

STELLA – we HATE hippies.

KAILA – why?

STELLA – the reason that I would really hurt someone if they called me a hippie is because hippies are fucking *delusional*. Just fucking – oh my god.

KAILA – why?

STELLA – they have a lot of good ideas but they live in this la-la land of (in mock hippie voice) ‘I’m gonna start a free trade coffee company and it’s gonna change the world, *man*...and then the whole fucking world is gonna smoke a joint’. That is so *delusional*, and I’m not stupid so don’t call me a hippie!

KAILA – so like hippies are delusional because they think they can make a difference?

STELLA - *they’re delusional because they think that it’s that simple*. And I feel like hippies are really good on getting stuck on one idea, ‘this one idea is good it’ll rock the world’, and that’s just – no. *There’s so much that would need to happen*...Basically it’s like a house – a house gets to a point where the only way you can salvage the house is to like, tear it down and build it again. And maybe you can like sort of salvage the foundation. But nothing else. And that’s how I feel about the world.

Indeed, many Crew members echoed Stella’s ideas about the sad state of affairs in which they found themselves, and shared her sense that this reality was too far gone to be fixed.

As Crew member Miranda told me, “I feel some big thing is gonna happen – it just has to – either that or we’re all just gonna die, and maybe that’s what it is. Someone’s gonna drop a bomb on someone and they’re gonna drop a bomb on someone else, it’s gonna happen,”. In fact, Stella told me about some videos she and some other Crew members had watched online that showed, among other things, individuals purchasing nuclear weapons off the ‘black market’. As she told me,

STELLA – it's a tape of people making guns with their bare hands in caves and they've been doing this their whole lives - you can't know that that's what's going on and try to change the world with greenbeans. You can't.

KAILA – greenbeans?

STELLA – yeah, you can't be like 'me and my greenbeans are gonna make everything are ok', when you know there are kids building guns with their barehands in Pakistan, when you know things like that are going on in the world - that if you have enough money you really can buy a fucking h-bomb for your basement, just to have it there. *How do people think that this is going to be okay. That there's some way we can fix this without starting over again?*

As a researcher I was struck by what I initially viewed as a 'doom and gloom' perspective on the world, and I wondered what effects that had on Crew member's engagement with their community and their world. I broached this topic in my conversation with Stella, asking her if the youth she knew were 'politically engaged'. She responded, "it kinda depends, like my friends in the Crew definitely not – most of them are like fuck voting, we're all gonna die. But my friends [from a church youth group] are definitely very involved but they're all like rich kids from Boston who can afford to be involved because they go to like Oberlin College, you know?". Here Stella is articulating how the class divide can manifest itself within frameworks of political engagement. And indeed, in my initial grappling with understanding the Crew's engagement with the outside world (or lack thereof) I had thought perhaps this was class related and I expressed this to Stella – whose response would help me come to see that the situation was far more complicated than I had imagined.

KAILA - I hear [these] kids saying the system is fucked and being political...and [it seems in contrast to] the middle class kids who go to suburban high schools and are told 'you can make a difference' and have to do community service work in order to graduate, and 'one person can make a difference' and then I hear these kids talk and I think actually like, you can see it as political apathy but I think it's really politically astute. They're like *I can't make a difference* – this is like a structural problem that one person cannot change, so why try?

STELLA – why try cause then your gonna have cops watching your house. Like, these aren't law abiding citizens, we already stick out like sore thumbs, we don't wanna sit there like banging pots and pans, drawing attention to ourselves, like...they already wanna harass us, why would we give them an excuse?

In fact, I hadn't really considered how the Crew's position - their astute awareness of how the community viewed them and their acute experiences with community surveillance – could lock them into a situation where they really couldn't become involved in (at least traditional forms of) activism like protests. Indeed, if you got in trouble for sitting with a handful of your friends on the sidewalk, how would you imagine you would be treated for actually instigating (what could be viewed as) disruptive 'political actions'? The increased surveillance of these youth thus worked to neuter them in (at least in mainstream forms of) political activism – something that is indeed resonant with the larger culture-wide policing of dissent, about which Crew members had an informed and realistic view. While some bemoan the 'lack' of organizing among today's generation and idealize the activism of the 1960s – I found, in my discussion with Stella, an articulation of how the larger cultural context in which activism happens has changed drastically in the past several decades.

KAILA –people say 'youth today are politically apathetic, just look at what they did in the 60s and 70s, that was REAL activism, and now they don't care'.

STELLA – but also like - but we also live in world where it's like –yeah, I'm sure we could find enough people that hate George Bush that could rally to have him impeached, but there would have been so many issues within that group. It's not something like the draft, you know, like the draft...that has nothing to do with gender identity or political affiliation, that's just like...people that I love are being made to go somewhere where they don't wanna go and *die*...and everyone can get together on that. *But when it's something like 'our presidents a douche-bag and he's doing fucked up things and we can't really prove it'...where do you go with that? And I feel like our government is also getting a lot better at making it impossible for that to happen.*

KAILA – how?

STELLA - just like...*how badly you can get fucked with the system. Like all those lists that your name can be put on by the government and shit,* like...how are you really gonna be this extreme political person?

KAILA – do you think it wasn't like that in the 70s? There wasn't that kind of shit from the state?

STELLA – there was but *there wasn't the same sort of technology to make it as easy and as possible as there is now.* You know?

This was crucial, in that Stella was articulating so many important aspects of how the world has changed (like in her reference to the splintering of identity groups), how the government has changed (especially in the post 9/11 world) to allow for heightened policing, and how technology has changed in ways that facilitate this increased surveillance. In this 'new world order', maybe the game wasn't different, but the stakes certainly were – and perhaps that's why Stella and other Crew members doubted the impact that one individual can make.

Additionally, the Crew's life experiences had also given them a particular take on the world that many would (mis)read as the 'disillusionment' characteristic of 'dissaffected' youth, but one which I came to view as political realism, conveying – as it did - an astute sense of the how many of the problems of the world were *structural* problems that required *structural* solutions. As with the case of ethnographer Herb Childress,

[i]n the great majority of cases of teenage 'misbehavior' I witnessed, I found that *what looks from the outside like sullenness or delinquency or disruptiveness or apathy are in fact reasonable acts in the face of obstacles that seem larger, more systemic, and more pervasive than we can see from our side of the shore.* [2000:280]

While we might think that the gap between 'our' (adult) and 'their' (teen) sides of the shore is a generation gap based upon age, the division between the 'experience' and 'maturity' of adults and those not yet 'developmentally' of age – as we commonly find in

the expert discourses of adolescence (reviewed in Chapter Two). But Childress cautions us against this view as he notes,

Adolescence is neither a condition nor a stage nor a phase. Adolescence is the search for the self, trying both to find and to make the person that they are and will continue to be. Teenagers are caught in the heart of the moment in the existential dilemma, placed into a system not of their own choosing and having to make a set of conscious decisions about their response, their position within it. When I speak of adolescence, I am not talking about a set of inherent psycho-physiological patterns, the one-way genetic road down which ‘they’ travel to become ‘us’; I am talking about the power-laden point of conflict between two sets of ideals, the intrusion of one way of living upon another. *There is a generation gap, and it has little to do with age. It has to do with power and status, with imposition and submission.* It is a cultural divide, as distinct as black and white, as broad as the Rio Grande. (2000:284 – emphasis added)

Indeed the Crew seemed well aware of not only the power differentials between youth and adults, but also of the cracks and gaps produced by the previous generations’ attempts to change the world, and the ensuing culture of volunteerism predicated on the belief that one person could ‘make a difference’ – ideas Stella, like many members of the Crew, would call “hippie bullshit”. In the following excerpt Stella expounds on this idea, and also critiques the modes of activism that are allowed for under this new regime.

KAILA – and is it stupid to think that individuals can make a difference?

STELLA – I think it’s pretty stupid to think that. Yeah.

KAILA – do you see any individuals – either that you know or historically that made a difference?

STELLA – I mean for sure. Emma Goldman is one of my personal heroes. But then again I couldn’t do what she did, I couldn’t go to jail like she did. I couldn’t handle that. And I know that about myself. But yeah if I was willing to go to jail and be on all these political blacklists then yeah, I could probably make a difference. But I could only make so much of a difference cause the second I started making a difference I’d be put in jail. ...

KAILA – is there anybody you can think of currently that makes a difference?

STELLA – (laughing) what you mean like Bono?

KAILA – that’s such a brilliant answer cause that’s what a lot of people think of

STELLA – how much good does Bono do when there's not a camera there? That's what I wanna fucking know. Fuck Bono.

KAILA – so what do you think of these people who go out there and start like Bono's Project Red thing, he's teaming up with the GAP

STELLA – it's a joke. It's all for show. He's not making a real difference. What was it, like 'Hands Across America'? *Look at how that changed the world.* Yeah.

KAILA – so it's just revolution that changes the world

STELLA – yeah and at this point that's going to have to be one hefty revolution.

Indeed, the Crew and other members of this generation inhabit a world where believing in traditional forms of activism is a privilege of the past. They have seen Hands Across America, they have heard *We Are The World*, they have watched footage of anti-war demonstrations during Vietnam and they have also seen the world that came out of these movements – one which was no better off for all these well-meaning 'hippies' and their 'greenbeans'. If anything, the world they have inherited is *more* policed and surveilled and dangerous and regulated than the world inhabited by the wide-eyed idealist activists generations before – as the majority of these youth had come of age in the post 9/11, Patriot Act world where your phones could be tapped and you could be 'detained' indefinitely and the government had unwaivering power. So yeah, thinking you could make a difference as an individual...if it wasn't a stupid idea it was certainly naïve. And as I came to find out, the Crew members were anything but naïve when it came to their community, and the world in which they lived. Indeed, their rejection of what they perceived as 'mainstream' American values would lead to their refusal to participate in the policies and programs designed to enroll them into this dominant ideology.

Political Economy And Policy Refusal: A System of Critique and Protection

Why *would* I like America right now? I've lived here my whole life and it's gotten to the point where I'm really starting to realize how fucked up things are. When I was traveling I got to see all types of people and I realized that there really is a big class division, the middle class is

disappearing. It was huge maybe a decade ago, but now it's disappearing. The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting...really poor, and there's disease running rampant, and drug problems everywhere, and there's this war going on. We [America] are just like a political giant who's stepping on everybody. We have all these supermarkets and fast food joints and you know everybody owns a car and we're making "progress" *man*, we're chopping down all the trees to grow soybeans and we're pumping out all the earth's blood so we can go to the fucking beach for the weekend. We're sitting high on the hog while everybody else eats our shit. [Stevo]

As this quote from Stevo illustrates, Crew members largely eschewed both the 'American Dream' and the rampant materialism upon which it is based. Indeed, many of these youth openly criticized mainstream American ideologies and were acutely aware of the class divisions produced and sustained through socialization into this system. Since Crew members didn't want to be part of what they viewed as mainstream society they resisted enrollment into 'the System', and their alternative economy (discussed in Chapter 6) worked to protect them from that fate. This is in stark contrast to the underground economy, referenced earlier, that Philippe Bourgois explores in his ethnography of drug dealers in Spanish Harlem, one which he notes is, "completely excluded from the mainstream economy and society but ultimately derived from it," (2006:115). Indeed, in Bourgois's conceptualization, this underground economy is,

not propelled by an irrational cultural logic distinct from that of mainstream USA. On the contrary, *street participants are frantically pursuing the "American dream."* The assertions of the culture of poverty theorists that the poor have been badly socialized and do not share mainstream values is wrong. On the contrary, ambition, energetic, inner city youths are attracted into the underground economy in order to try frantically to get their piece of the pie as fast as possible. [2006:118 – my emphasis]

In contrast the Crew's political economy had an ideological underpinning based upon *critique* of the 'American dream' and a *refusal* to buy into 'the system'. This was also a

large part of the reason that most Crew members didn't engage with the community-based organizations which purported to offer them 'help'.

As Stella explained to me, "I feel like most of the programs out there are trying to help them get that – society's idea of what a life should be like. It's trying to help them get a 9-to-5 and that's not what they're looking for". When I asked what it was they *were* looking for, Stella responded, "freedom, mostly". Indeed, I came to understand that the 'freedom' they sought was an escape from mainstream society and it's emphasis on money, materialism and domestication. For the 'helping' groups in Hilltown that – as Stella noted - were invested in fostering a different subjectivity among their program participants, the Crew's anti-mainstream perspective was not only misunderstood, but indeed, acted as a division – a barrier – which neither party could (or would) cross. An excerpt from our discussion illuminates how this ideological difference translated into a material disjuncture between the Crew and Hilltown's architecture of assistance.

KAILA – so what about all those organizations that try to help them?

STELLA – yeah. Yeah, I think that uh...these are people that don't like being told that they're wrong...because really the bottom line is that there is nothing wrong with it.

KAILA – nothing wrong with what?

STELLA – the way they live.

KAILA – but society thinks there is

STELLA – exactly, which is why they kind of don't want help from them.

Yet the Crew's ideological refusal of mainstream society put them in – what was in many ways – an untenable position. As she told me, "I've talked to friends of mine that are homeless and they don't wanna be but they also don't wanna have a job that they hate and a landlord that they hate and responsibilities that they hate." But it wasn't simply that the Crew refused to work – indeed *most* of them did work, as previously noted – rather the issue was that their values and skills were not necessarily 'employable' in the

mainstream economy. As Stella explained, “some of these kids have plenty to offer as people, but not a whole lot to offer society. And once you’ve taken yourself out of society how do you get back in? When you know how to make a fanny pack out of a dead squirrel but you don’t know how to use a cash register, how are you going to get a job?”.

Since, as previously noted, even the Crew members who were able to find jobs were often not able to make ends meet, I asked Stella about the Crew members relationship to state-based assistance. Our ensuing conversation, excerpted below, illuminates how the ideological underpinnings of the Crew’s alternative economy was – in many ways – a response to the negative experiences they had in their prior enrollment into educational or foster-care programs of the state.

KAILA – do they ever go on state assistance?

STELLA – most of them have food stamps

KAILA – ok, so there would be a lot of people who would be like – ‘if they don’t have a job and don’t wanna be part of society’ – this isn’t my view right – but [some people would ask then] ‘why are they taking money from the state’?

STELLA – oh I mean a lot of them feel like it’s owed to them.

KAILA – because of why?

STELLA - especially like kids who got fucked by the system...You know, they feel like ‘if I’m *fucked up* because of you, you can at least feed me so that I don’t starve to death’. And they do take care of themselves A LOT. There’s a lot of organized trips to go dumpster diving, like there’s this amazing chocolate factory in Vermont that throws away all the warped chocolate. That’s a great place to go dumpster diving, you can get like fucking cheesecake out of those dumpsters. *So it’s not like they’re just sitting there waiting for handouts.* These kids are going out and like killing rabbits to eat, and eating food out of dumpsters. These kids definitely – they *take care of themselves.* *And they take care of each other.*

While the Crew did accept some state ‘assistance’ it was *only* the financial programs (like foodstamps or housing assistance) and *never* the more ambiguous ‘support’ programs

(like community-based youth groups) largely because *the financial programs didn't require personal contact with representatives from state agencies*. This crucial matter is discussed in the following section which explores the ways in which policies and programs designed to 'help' often failed in their attempts to reach out to those most disenfranchised youth.

When Policy Fails: The Politics of Non-Participation

In extensive interviews with 50 homeless adolescents in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties last year, only 48 percent said they used shelters or drop-in centers. The remaining 52 percent were a hidden population, so afraid they would be sent home or placed in foster care that they shunned all contact with service providers and what they viewed as the authoritarian adult world. [Stanford University Press Release:1991]

Like the homeless youth in the Stanford University study, the Crew members in Hilltown actively refused to participate in support groups where they would come face-to-face with state program representatives. Indeed, such interactions were perceived by the Crew as dangerous, and just like the homeless teens in the above study, "the fear was well grounded; Service providers are mandated to notify parents or civil authorities of a teen's request for assistance, and agencies can provide shelter for only a limited period without such notification," (Stanford: 1991). Indeed, I learned this first hand while in 'the field'.

During my research in Hilltown the community became increasingly concerned with the issue of youth homelessness when the only shelter that admitted those under the age of 18 was closed due to state budget cuts. Members of several local youth-serving agencies came together one evening to discuss the possibilities of opening what they termed a 'teen warming center' (*not* a shelter – as that would require an entirely different set of regulations) where teen 'floaters' or 'couch-surfers' (*not* 'homeless youth' – as serving a population designated as 'homeless' raised another host of logistical issues)

could come and warm up for the night when they didn't have any other place to go. I was present at this meeting and while I was impressed by the concern shown by some of the attendees about the welfare of Hilltown youth, I was also disappointed when the 'logistics' of the center were discussed.

The individuals running the meeting and leading the (well-intentioned) efforts to create the warming center conceptualized this space as "specifically for non-service youth" (meaning youth who didn't access the other support programs in Hilltown). Yet they were also careful to inform us that "we're not enabling teens to hang out – we're not about giving hangout space to recalcitrant teens who just don't like curfew". Thus, they told us that the first thing that would happen during 'intake' when a youth 'presented' with needing a place to warm up (but not 'sleep') for the night was parental notification. I was shocked to learn that the center would have to receive *parental consent* for any youth under the age of 18 to 'warm up' there, given that it was likely that most of these youth were indeed seeking refuge from their parents and their home. When I brought up this issue, and asked what happened if a parent refused to give their consent, I was told that the center would be forced to notify the Department of Social Services (DSS).¹⁸⁰ I knew then that, all good intentions aside, no youth I knew in Hilltown would make use of this service.

In addition to youth refusing participation in these programs for fear of mandated reporting and parental notification, many youth also didn't utilize the community-based support groups (like SMAK) which prioritized intervening upon youth's sexually 'risky'

¹⁸⁰ "But," they were quick to add in response to my question, "the reality is these kids just lie - they lie and say they are 18". A strategy I knew would fail once the warming center began to require identification and proof of age – something that I was sure would end up being a contingency for any funding stream.

behaviors, because these were eclipsed by more immediate concerns. As one youth in the Stanford University study noted, “Why would I worry about dying from AIDS in the future when I don’t know if I’m going to survive until tomorrow?” (Stanford,1991). The queer youth in Hilltown were indeed ‘at risk’ – to differing degrees in different circumstances – but it was not primarily the sexually based risk that was the most pressing issue to attend to for many of these individuals, and as such the programs like SMAK or the GSA were at best simply irrelevant, and at worst threatened to enroll them into a system whose radar they worked hard to elude.

“Waiting For The World To End”: Hope As Privilege

These kids...it’s kinda funny because society can hate them and do whatever, but you can’t crush this. These kids can run faster than any cops, these kids hop trains, these kids fucking cut themselves open and give themselves stitches. You can’t just like squash them. [Stella]

In our conversation when I asked Stella why it was that some of the Crew members were – as she had said – “like, *fuck* voting”, she responded, “[because] these are kids that...really just feel like they don’t have voices at all, they just feel like they get fucked over and that’s their job in society.” In fact, it wasn’t simply the working-class background that gave the Crew members this idea – rather it was the long, slow and systematic ‘fucking over’ by society, the state, their communities, their schools, and their workplaces that made them believe this. Indeed, this was a common narrative for Crew members, and one that Birdie also uncovered in her interview with Stevo during their discussion of growing up without a safety net.

BIRDIE – so what does that feel like [to not have a safety net], how does that affect you in your life?

STEVO – I don’t know, it’s kinda scary. *Sometimes I feel like I’ll never really get accomplished...that the whole world is against me.* Cause like – right now I owe the registry of motor vehicles 153 dollars for not renewing my license, and it’s a completely made up fine...and because of

that I don't have an ID right now, because I can't do anything at the registry until I pay that fee. And it's just shit like that. That and health insurance – like I don't have any health insurance. *And you know, I try to stay off the map as much as possible – I don't want the government getting in my business*, cause you know, it's hard enough without the government trying to put me in jail which is always happening it seems. *I'm always getting threatened by the state and the police*

BIRDIE – for money reasons or what?

STEVO – yeah, just cause they want my money. And I don't have any money, I don't have any money to give them. And there's this thing called 'free care'.... I tried going to the free clinics and stuff, but they still send you a bill. I owe SO much money to the local hospital here, it's not even funny. It's just such a big mess, I'm pretty sure it's just a big lie. I don't have any money to give them. And the money I do have I'm gonna keep for myself.

BIRDIE – I need to eat tonight

STEVO – not only do I need to eat tonight, but *I want to have a future*, I don't just want to be a slave to some fucking hospital so I can pay them for stuff that didn't even happen. I'm gonna pretend that I don't even exist.

When Birdie asked him about the future he wanted to have he said, “I want to be a professional musician and make tons of money playing rock and roll,” then he paused and added, “it's probably never going to happen”. Yet almost as soon as he said this goal for his future he changed his mind to something (perhaps) more attainable – “I just want to be happy,” he said. But then he once again amended his vision of the future,

STEVO – I don't know, I'm just waiting for the world to end.

BIRDIE – really?

STEVO – yeah. That probably won't happen so I'll be waiting for a while. I'll probably die. I'll be old, and probably living here still, just like all the other old guys who live here and die here. I'll probably die of a drug overdose, or drinking too much or something. I predict my future will be sad and lonely and I'll probably be an unimportant thing that will just die off – no kids and no wife and no...nothing.

This was a sad – but not uncommon vision of Crew members futures. It was also very much part of their *present* reality. As Stella told me, “these are the people that are just kinda like – you know, they wake up every morning and they walk outside their door and

they look at everything and they're just like 'fuck',". "They don't see potential?" I asked her. She replied, "nope" and then took a long pause before continuing,

STELLA – *I think they just kind of feel like they're gonna be miserable, kinda no matter what. So they just...give up, kinda.*

KAILA – do you feel like there's hope for them?

STELLA – some of them. Not all, that's for sure. I have some friends that I know I'm gonna see in like a trenchcoat on a street when I come back to visit.

KAILA – so for some people you feel like this group is just something they're doing for now, and for other people this group is permanent?

STELLA – exactly

KAILA – and what makes the dividing line between those people?

STELLA - um, a few different things. There's how depressed you are...and how much of an alcoholic you are...and how much outside support you have. Like I know I'm not gonna be this person for ever because I know that people who care about me wouldn't let that happen. But...some of them really don't have that, at all, the people that care about them are the people that are in the same boat as them. I think it's probably just – how many times you got beat up growing up. Maybe the kids that are 'upwardly mobile' had like one teacher they were close with in high school, *it really is something as small as that.*

KAILA – just like one individual in your life telling you maybe life doesn't suck?

STELLA – yeah. Exactly.

Still it was clear that many of these youth had never had that one individual that reached out to them or told them that they were worth something – that they could make something of their lives. Ironically, this may have been something they could have found at SMAK or the GSA – one individual who might tell them life was worth living – if they had participated in these programs.

Indeed, for those who did participate in SMAK or the GSA it was not uncommon for them to credit the group with 'saving their lives'. For policy makers, however, these groups worked to enroll youth into *particular kinds of lives* and help them (in the language of much policy work) 'transition (in)to adulthood'. However, as Herb Childress notes in discussing how institutions seek to put teens onto the adult path, "adult path, of

course, is far too easy a phrase. There are many adult paths, and our institutions pursue only the most *mainstream* and *middle class*,” (2000:278 – emphasis added). In his ethnography of youth in ‘Curtisville’ Childress states that, “[i]t is both puzzling and tragic that so many of Curtisville’s teenagers were fighting at every opportunity for the more unique and complex self while all of Curtisville’s institutions were seeking to make those selves *more systematic, simple and compliant*,” (2000:283 – emphasis added).

Hilltown’s institutions of adolescence likewise attempted to enroll youth into ‘mainstream’ values and compliant behavior, and many of the youth knew it. Some would still participate in these groups, using the provided spaces strategically to glean whatever resources they needed that day - be it friends, food, computers or just something to do. For other youth however, the *risks* of joining these groups – be it the mandatory reporting or simply one more adult telling them the ‘right’ way to be in the world – far outweighed the benefits. So what did this mean for them – and for their futures? While so much is made (in both popular as well as academic accounts) of teens’ desire to move, their desire for change, their desire for speed – desires which are imagined as age-based, developmental and thus transcendent of ‘categories of youth’ (i.e. those identity-based groups such as race, class, gender, etc.) - in my research this wasn’t the present case, or at least, it wasn’t the future possibility.

While many of the youth spoke of a desire to leave Hilltown: some through the Armed Forces (‘*when I’m in the army I’m going to travel everywhere and see the world*’), more through social networks (‘*my buddy has a friend in Austin, Texas*’ ... ‘*Jester’s gonna show me how to trainhop to Cali*’ ... ‘*I gotta job working in a café there, i’m gonna crash on Blakes’ couch till my first check comes in*’ ...) and not a single one of

them through college (...) – the adults in Hilltown spoke to me mostly about how the majority of these youth would never leave this small community. At first I chalked this up to the adults being out-of-touch with the youth. Indeed, I thought the non-profit worker, the teacher, the guidance counselor, the principal, the café-owner, the community college dean, the bartender – they just didn't know the kids like I did, they didn't have relationships with them, and thus they weren't privy to the same kinds of conversations I was about wishes and hopes and futures. And, indeed, they may not have been. Still, they were right.

Indeed, both during my research and over the next few years I would listen to kids' plans, I would help them pack, I would see them off – waving to that car or bus or bike as it got smaller and smaller – only to get the phone call, make the pick up, watch them unpack, and see them slide back into their social scene (into the space that I think was always quietly and hopefully reserved for them, even if never acknowledged) with head nods and hugs and minimal explanations. The length of time they were gone varied – some returned after a few days, others clocked about 9 months away – but only one did I see leave for good – and here 'good' means twenty miles down the highway and currently on year number two.

What did I make of this? I really wasn't sure in the moment. And I felt torn about what I should want for them (only the slightest echo of how torn *they* felt about what they 'should' want for themselves). I know that I heard them talk about wanting to leave, and I know that most of the adults they interacted with verbally encouraged them to leave and envisioned their successful future primarily as one where they *left*. But it wasn't defined as an adventure – it wasn't a future they were going towards – rather, it

was understood as an *escape* – it was a past they were getting away from. I never heard it referred to as ‘moving forward’ I only heard about it as ‘getting out’. Indeed, I wasn’t sure what to make not only of this particular issue of escape, but of all the issues raised in my interactions with the Crew or with SMAK and GSA youth. At first glance the issues facing the Crew, the Voc student-workers, and the SMAK participants may appear to be very different from one another. In reality, however, certain themes emerged in all three settings that served as threads tying together what could be conceptualized as disparate groups of youth. It is to these connections that I turn my attention in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 8

THEORIZING HILLTOWN YOUTH: ETHNOGRAPHIC FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

It is well known that what tends to become outdated first in ethnographies is the theory....Long after the theoretical platforms of ethnographies have been superseded, what still makes them interesting as texts are the chronicle they offer of a society observed in a given historical moment; and the fictions they often unwittingly embrace, the fiction of who the ethnographer thought she/he was in the field, the fiction of how that society was constructed by the ethnographer, whether harmoniously or conflictively, depending on the nuances of the ethnographer's sensibility and the historical moment in which the ethnographer happened to be present as an observer. [Behar, 1997:4]

In the first few chapters of this dissertation I devoted a lot of space to exploring the various theories, analytic frameworks and methods utilized in the study of youth over the past century. I then turned my attention to my ethnographic material – culled from members of SMAK, the GSA, and the Crew. In these chapters I focused primarily on the descriptions of youth-inhabited spaces (the community-based organization, the high school and the street) and the narratives produced by youth in each of these sites. Indeed, in each case I've primarily let the stories 'speak for themselves', with a minimum of analysis and theory building, and no real attempt to connect these (seemingly) disparate groups of youth in Hilltown. This has been a somewhat conscious strategy, as I wanted to paint the 'Big Picture' before deconstructing it, analyzing it, and breaking it down into its constitutive parts. Perhaps Behar's above statement about what 'sticks' in ethnography is the reason I've been hesitant to theorize about my 'findings'.

Nonetheless, the time has come to explore the ethnographic material through the theoretical frameworks presented earlier in the dissertation, to delineate and then also

‘problematize’ my findings with a more analytic lens. In order to do this I will trace the connections between these three field sites, and explore the correlations – and fissures – for the subject positions ‘youth’, ‘queer’, ‘working-class’ and ‘rural’. As I will illustrate, each of these identities and subjectivities share some interesting associations – both in terms of their historic construction and their history as topics of academic concern, as well as the interesting ways each of them are utilized in policy-making, remade on the ground by policy-receivers or resisted by policy-refusers.

As I have illustrated, whether it was on the streets of Hilltown, in the halls of the Voc, or in the rec room at SMAK, the youth in this community struggled to carve out symbolic and physical space for themselves: and they were met – in all settings – with adult surveillance and harassment, with the limitation of their self-expression and freedom, and with messages that served to hem youth into specific socially-sanctioned positions (such as ‘student’ or ‘worker’). They were ascribed identities by community members that rarely, if ever, matched their self-identification, and they continually struggled for educational and economic opportunities. For almost all of these youth, the paths leading out of Hilltown (or even for a higher quality of life within Hilltown) were limited. Their teenage years were not the romanticized time of self and (hetero)sexual exploration. Nor was it the age of endless adventures that we as a culture continue to imagine as the hallmark of adolescence. No, these youth were never afforded that luxury, one that I came to understand as much more about class position and geographic location than it was about ‘alternative’ sexuality.

Indeed, in both the community and educational settings, sexuality became central mostly in terms of the access it afforded them to sexual identity-based resources, such as

SMAK or the GSA. While some youth (queer and straight) did take advantage of one - or both - of these resources, others – like the Crew - attended neither group. While these non-participants may have had a variety of experiences with members of the same and opposite sex, many of them did not identify as queer or straight. Other youth who did partake in these groups may have held fast to a sexual identity while never having sexual experiences of either kind. Thus, much of the scholarship I read about queer or questioning youth – research which tended to focus *either* on behavior (enrolling in studies youth who had had same-sex experiences regardless of their identification) or identity (focusing on self-identified queer youth regardless of actual experience or behavior) seemed thin in addressing the complexities and fluidities of real-life ‘experience-identification’. Indeed, even in the educational and community contexts created specifically for those who were queer or questioning, capital ‘S’ Sexuality (its theoretical and political construction) was rarely a topic of discussion. While youth may talk about their (straight or queer) sexual experiences or relationships, most often the youth were simply happy to have someone listen to the minutia of their days.

For many of these youth the GSA and SMAK served as the ‘family’ meeting, the dinner table many youth lacked at home, over which people could tell jokes, and were as likely to be heard complaining about a biology exam or a difficult boss as debating about sexuality. Indeed, regardless of their sexuality, youth used such spaces strategically as a place to gather with friends and interact with caring adults – or for the resources these groups offered which the youth otherwise lacked at home (like computers, fieldtrips, friendships and free food). Even while ostensibly ‘queer’, these groups operated as a ‘free space’ (Fine & Weis, 1998) where youth could gain access to resources, build

community and feel free to talk about a range of personal issues. Interestingly, for the Crew members who did not participate in these groups, the ‘scary’ and much maligned congregations of youth in front of the local coffee shops served much of the same purpose (while lacking many of the material resources). As Fine & Weis describe,

These young women and men are ‘homesteading’ – finding unsuspected places within their geographic communities, their public institutions, and their spiritual lives, to sculpt real and imagined spaces for peace, communion, personal, and collective work....These spaces offer recuperation, resistance, and ‘home.’ They are not just a set of geographical/spatial arrangements, but theoretical, analytical, and spatial displacements – a crack, a fissure, a place to come together and restore sanity, and to imagine possibilities. [1998:252-3]

Indeed, I argue that in a community where youth were under intense scrutiny and systematic surveillance both in the halls of the educational system, as well as on the streets of the town, such free spaces and their attendant resources were difficult to come by, but ultimately crucial. Especially because these youth occupied ‘marked’ identities in multiple ways - by their age, sexual practices, economic background and geographic location – the increased attention (read: policing) they garnered from both their immediate community as well as the state writ large made “a place to come together and restore sanity” all the more important. It is also only one of the many connections between the construction of – research into – ‘youth’, ‘class’, ‘queer sexuality’ and ‘rurality’ that Hilltown youth lived through. A more thorough discussion of these connections are now in order.

Subject Positions Vs. Lived Subjectivities: A Geneological Approach

It is now a commonplace, of course, to refer to the objects of the scientific imagination as ‘socially constructed’...But the language of social construction is actually rather weak. It is not very enlightening to be told repeatedly that something claimed as ‘objective’ is in fact ‘socially constructed’. Objects of thought are constructed in thought: what else could they be? So the interesting questions concern the ways in which

they are constructed. Where do objects emerge? Which are the authorities who are able to pronounce upon them? Through what concepts and explanatory regimes are they specified? How do certain constructions acquire the status of truth – through experimental procedures, demonstrations and other interventions, through the production of effects and the reflection on effects, through the rhetorical deployment of evidence and logic and so forth? [Rose, 1989:X-XI]

By now it should be evident that all the subject positions these youth inhabited (regarding age, sexuality, class and geographic location) are not only marked identities but are, indeed, socially constructed. But as Rose's above quote elucidates, the intellectual project requires us to go a step further – to not simply describe these subject positions as social constructs, but to explore the history of these constructions, the ways in which they have become embedded in our cultural imaginary as 'truths', and the effects they have on individuals who inhabit these positions. And so, in this section, I want to highlight the connections I have come to see between the historical construction of 'youth', 'queers', 'the working-class' and those who inhabit 'rural' spaces. I'll then trace these histories as they play out in academic research, mainstream discourse and policy-making. Finally, I'll offer some policy recommendations before turning my attention to reflections upon ethnographic collaboration. I begin with a discussion of some similarities between these subject positions, connections which I first came to understand through the debate over the Crew's street hangout.

Indeed, the fact that the Crew attracted the contentious responses by 'outsiders' is not unique to Hilltown. As Herb Childress notes, "the issue of teenagers' hangouts is an active concern in hundreds of small communities across the country," (1993:1). In fact, we as a culture invest an incredible amount of time and energy into policing the use of public space by adolescents, viewing their 'hanging out' as a threat to both the community (they seem threatening and intimidating to outsiders) and to the teenagers

themselves, as it raises the specter of “a lifetime of sloth and unemployment” (1993:2). In – and through – this conceptualization, the innocuous activity of ‘hanging out’ becomes reframed as a quasi-illegal act, what I term a ‘public display of leisure’.¹⁸¹ That such public displays of leisure by working-class adolescents are viewed as a “moral problem to be eliminated” (1993:2) should be seen as evidence of a community’s unease with their youngest members as not-yet-productive citizens and as potential threats to the social order. Even as adolescence itself is culturally defined largely through the availability of leisure time, the *acceptability* of leisure – where and how it takes place, and indeed if it should take place at all – is, I argue, intimately connected to socio-economic class. This is just one example of how Hilltown youth are ‘classed out’ of our cultural mythology of adolescence.

But there is not just one cultural mythology of adolescence. Indeed, I argue that there are two. One – which is unmarked – but is implicitly a middle-class mythology where teens are assumed to have ample leisure time, believe themselves to be invincible, and are free from the responsibilities (i.e. bills, children, etc.) that mark the ‘real world’. As I’ve illustrated in this dissertation, the Hilltown youth I worked with never had any of those (classed) privileges. Instead, they are framed by another mythology of adolescence – one which is marked as working-class and defined by the ‘risks’ they pose to themselves, and (as the above discussion about leisure illustrates) by the ‘risks’ they pose to the society if they do not fulfill their futures as workers and citizens. In this mythology

¹⁸¹ Interestingly, Ruddick notes that, “if there is a common characteristic running through the sites that homeless youth in LA County occupied by tactical appropriation, it was their quality as sites of leisure: the beaches, Hollywood, Sunset Strip, or Disneyland for example,” (1997:357)

of adolescence, youth are seen either as a threat or as a victim of circumstance. This is indeed similar to how the working-class writ large is viewed, as explored below.

As previously noted, there is a tendency in some scholarship to highlight the tragedy in stories about ‘the poor’, such that a focus on the “incessant struggle, the rampant injustice” (Tea, 2003:XIII) has come to characterize the narratives about working-class lives.¹⁸² Michele Tea, for instance, cites the best selling book *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (Ehrenrich, 2004) as an archetype of this literary romance with struggle that pervades the treatises on the (now capitalized) Working-Class Experience. I capitalize this phrase to denote its essentialization – one characterized in mainstream work by an emphasis on struggle. Anthropologist Elizabeth Chin identifies a similar focus on ‘the tragic’ in academic research – specifically ethnographic research – into poverty. As she notes, “from Oscar Lewis’s *La Vida* (1966) to Philippe Bourgois’s *In Search of Respect* (1995), the ethnography of poverty has tended to focus on harsh material realities” (2001:28).

Critically, I note that it is ‘the tragic’ which captures our attention not only in both academic and mainstream explorations of the *working-class*, but indeed also in our academic and mainstream explorations of *youth* (see for example Ayman-Nolley & Taira, 2000). Indeed, in both mainstream books and academic texts on class there is a ‘crush on struggle’ that mirrors, interestingly, the ‘romance of resistance’ that has been critiqued in much of the early cultural youth studies (Walker, 1986). Crucially, the focus on ‘struggle’ or ‘risk’ not only characterizes work on the working-class and work on youth,

¹⁸² “When poor and working-class people are written about – and usually we are written *about*, rarely telling our own stories – it’s always the tragedy that is documented,” (Tea, 2003:XII).

but – as previously discussed - also narratives about *queer sexuality* and *rurality*. So it is not just that ‘youth’, ‘working-class’, ‘queer’ or ‘rural’ are social constructs – it is that they all share a certain type of construction – one which transforms structural inequalities into problems with individuals and then vacillates between seeing these individuals either as threats or as victims. As I explore below, this is tied to the history of the construction of these subject positions.

Indeed, in the case of each of these identities/subject positions there is a discernable cycle that goes something like this: First, scholars identify that there is a lack of discourse or knowledge about X (X being the ‘working-class’, ‘queers’, ‘youth’ or those living in ‘rural’ spaces). Second, researchers go out in search of information about X (indeed, this is characterized as the ‘hidden from history’ approach to sexuality studies described by Vance, 1991). Third, in the collected stories about X it is either the tragedy or risks that are highlighted so that – depending on the emphasis – the X come to be seen either as threats that require surveillance, or as victims in need of saving. Importantly, regardless of whether the X are seen as threats or victims, in both cases they require *intervention*. At this point one can discern two different trajectories: one trajectory has analytic implications, the second has policy consequences. While in reality the two trajectories are not all that bounded, separate and self contained – as the two interact and intersect at multiple points – I will deal with each of them in turn. I begin by exploring the analytic implications, using the example of class and adolescence first, before exploring queer sexuality and rurality.

1. Analytic Implications

In both mainstream and academic work, the focus either on tragedy and victimization, or struggle and resistance, frame both ‘the working-class’ and ‘youth’ (and in particular, ‘working-class youth’) in specific ways: one may ‘grant’ more agency (or, as some have argued, ‘projected revolutionary fantasies’) to these individuals, the other may paint them as passive victims. Of course, neither extreme captures the complexities of either adolescent or working-class experiences. As Chin notes, ethnographic research into poverty, “while highlighting the point that those who live in poverty can think and speak about their situations with great insight, has not often addressed the ways in which those who are economically strapped understand and manipulate the symbolic world around them” (2001:28). In contrast, work on (especially working-class) youth has emphasized their ‘symbolic manipulation’ of their worlds, but negate the real impact this has, noting that this ‘solves’, “but in an imaginary way, problems which at the concrete material level remain unsolved” (Bennett & Kahn-Harris, 2004:6).¹⁸³ But there is also a danger to these narratives, for as Alan Berube notes,

the danger in describing a working-class life from the inside is the temptation to frame one’s narrative within a ‘rhetoric of hardship’ – a storytelling strategy that tried to mitigate class oppression by appealing to the sympathy and generosity of the more fortunate. This rhetorical strategy is very seductive because it reshapes working-class lives into stories of courageous struggle against impossible odds. It may be the working-class equivalent of using the coming-out story as an appeal for heterosexual understanding and acceptance. [1997:62-63]

Thus, Berube too sees the connections between the ‘rhetoric of hardship’ for both queers as well as for the working-class. But perhaps most important is what he says next,

¹⁸³ Bennett & Kahn-Harris make that assertion specifically in relation to the youth subcultures studied by the Birmingham school.

But the class hardship narrative only reinforces class hierarchies in the telling. Even as it makes visible and validates the lives of working-class people, and evokes sympathy from middle-class listeners, it reduces us to either victims or heroes. Our lives become satisfying dramas of suffering that end in inspiring victory or poignant tragedy. [1997:63 – my emphasis]

Berube's work here teach us an important analytic lesson – one that we might have gleaned before through my literature review on adolescent developmental models.

As previously explored, when scholars critiqued developmental models - arguing that they were based on one particular kind of subject - the result was a proliferation of developmental models, rather than an undoing of development as a framework, and thus, further cemented the 'truth' about development as a concept. In a similar vein, then, Berube points us to see that the proliferation of stories of working-class suffering actually serve – not to dismantle class – but rather to reinforce class as a concept: to naturalize and essentialize class experiences in a way that makes it an issue of the individual rather than of society. Here we may remember Wyn & White's work (reviewed in chapter 3) on how the 'false split' between society and the individual underscores developmental frameworks such that structural problems are reinterpreted as personal failures. More than an analytic shift, the essentialization of these categories and the focus on personal failure makes it impossible for us to think our way out of these categories, and – perhaps most crucially – turns our focus away from structural issues and their possible solution or dismantling. In the history of research on rurality, class and queer sexuality, this has played out in some interesting ways.

As previously noted, both rural people and working-class people are imagined as having more traditional (read: backwards) views on gender and sexuality. We can understand this in a number of ways depending on how deep we take our analysis. At the most synthetic level we can accept this as true and explore 'why' this happens, as

Elizabeth Clare does when she notes that it isn't that, "rural white people are any more homophobic than the average urban person. Rather, the difference lies in urban anonymity" (1997:17). To some level, this is of course a valid point as large cities may provide more of a safety net against being recognized. Yet again, this does not critically analyze the idea that the rural working-class are more homophobic – rather it *explains* why that is – and in doing so *implicitly reinforces this idea*.

In contrast, witness Joanna Kadi's take on class and homophobia. As she notes, "only one class is classified outright as the most homophobic. Working-class/working-poor people claim the dubious honor of being dubbed more homophobic (and more racist, and more sexist) than rich people" (1997:34-35). In a move akin to the Critical Youth Studies tradition, Kadi explores the sites where this idea plays out when she explains that "[t]his holds true in mainstream society, queer organizations, and other progressive movements" (ibid.) But in a move towards a genealogy of this idea Kadi asks the crucial set of questions; "[w]hy is this idea so prevalent? How did it get started? Who benefits?" (1997:34-35). Like Berube, Kadi contends that through the proliferation of this idea, "class divisions are heightened and reinforced," (1997:37) with a number of consequences, the most important of which is that "the grim reality of who has the power to keep homophobia, racism, and classism securely in place is obscured" (ibid.). As she explains,

I do want to articulate the difference between our homophobia and the homophobia of the rich. Truck drivers and garbagemen don't determine social policies. We don't make laws and decide what's acceptable and what's not. Wealthy people hold that power. They don't wait for us outside queer bars to beat us up; that's a working-class response for sure. *But wealthy people do occupy judges' benches and presidents' offices and corporate boardrooms, and devise policies that ensure our children will be stolen, our relationships outlawed, our jobs taken, our partners denied*

health insurance. The queer movement must clearly name the powerful homophobes and strategize how to go after them. [1997:37 – my emphasis]

In contrast, Kadi notes that rather than naming and working against ‘powerful homophobes’, “the queer movement has focused on building alliances with rich people” (ibid.). She states that this is not a conscious strategy, rather, “it happens because middle- and upper-class leadership steers toward people and institutions they know” (1997:37). I found this to be true at COMA as well, as the majority of the Council was white and upper-class. But what we don’t want to do here is pathologize the good intentions of those who have the time and *the privilege to give their time for free* to activist causes. Rather, we want to explore the *effects* of these alliances, and the discourses they are deployed against.

Here, the work of Professor Lisa Henderson on queer visibility, social class and the media draws for us some crucial connections in cultural discourses about both queers and the working-class. As she notes,

there has long existed the routine cultural attribution, to both working-class people and homosexuals, of a constitutional state of bodily excess. Working class people, who are both the majority core of the U.S. population and the demeaned periphery of its symbolic universe, are imagined as physically just *too* much: too messy, too ill, too angry, too needy, too out of control, too unrestrained and, critically, too sexual. [Manuscript:9]

Henderson further contends that “excessive bodies need self-regulation for new or renewed admission to the precincts of social success and civic viability” (ibid.).

Increasingly, this ‘social success and civic viability’ for queers is attained – or believed to be attained – in part through class assimilation, or perhaps more correctly – through enrollment into a kind of sexuality that is itself classed. As Henderson illustrates through the example of the *Times* printing same-sex marriage announcements, this “widens the

stage for queer legitimacy through a class ascendance marked by bodily control (love, not sex; marriage, not dating)” (Manuscript:31). The queer assimilation into ‘normalcy’ through ‘appropriate’ behaviors and ‘appropriate’ class aspirations was also noted by Kadi regarding the attitudes of the 1993 Queer March on Washington. As she states, “I thought I would throw up if I heard one more TV interview with an earnest, middle-class queer explaining ‘We’re just like everyone else. This march will prove that.’ For the phrase ‘everyone else,’ read middle-class, white, monogamous, heterosexual couple. Don’t read poor, Chicana, single mom” (1997:38).

We see vestiges of the class reverberations in assimilationist strategies likewise in Ritch Savin-Williams work in *The New Gay Teenager*, where he contends that gay youth today believe that “to be treated like everyone else is the new revolution” (2005:17). But which ‘everyone else’ do they seek to be treated like? We might imagine that Savin-Williams provides an answer in his argument that assimilation “enhances acceptance through personal contact and the shattering of stereotypes [because] straight people realize that gay adults also have children, give to charity, worry about trash pick-up, attend religious services, and maintain nice lawns,” (2005:16). Here Savin-Williams is clearly envisioning a certain kind of neighborhood (middle-class, suburban) and he is emphasizing a particular vision of queerness, one more interested in class mobility than radical critique and one which prioritizes the children of gay couples over queer youth themselves.

When Savin-Williams states that “the majority of young people of both sexes with same-sex desire resist and refuse to identify as gay...Their desire is not to stand out ‘like a semen stain on a blue dress’, but to be as boring as the next person, to buy an SUV and

to fade into the fabric of American life,” (2005:216) queer assimilation is imagined to be possible through a certain kind of consumption – one that is inherently classed – and politically mainstream. While it is clear that not every ‘queer’ is either interested in – or benefits from – this type of normalization, policy-makers continue to work towards assimilation rather than revolution. This leads us into a discussion of the second trajectory of the individual/social split and the threat/victim focus in explorations of ‘queers’, the ‘working-class’, ‘youth’ and those in ‘rural’ environments: the policy implications.

2. Policy Implications & The (Im)Possibility of Policy Recommendations

In his book *Speaking Truth to Power: The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis*, Aaron Wildavsky notes that it is not the case that policy makers construct or create problems out of thin air. Rather he states, “the difficulties the public policy is to alleviate can be found somewhere out there in society. *People experience distress, which is a subjective state of individual citizens*, reflecting an implied contrast between experienced reality and expectations” (1979:353 – my emphasis). Policy makers are implicated in this disjuncture between individual experiences and social expectations as they must try to alleviate the distress individuals face by the implementation of policies and programming.

In other words, when X becomes identified as ‘at risk’ or as ‘victims’ they (as a population) become a policy problem. This means that 1) funding streams are opened up for policy makers to construct programs for X, and then 2) more research is then needed to both keep the funding stream open and also to identify whether the programs for X are efficacious. These programs – while ostensibly meant to help X, also subject them to

increased surveillance where they are ‘intervened’ upon by the state. Such interventions, again while meant to ‘help’ X, is actually an attempt to assimilate X into mainstream (read: middle-class) behaviors, values or norms.

Indeed, Wildavsky’s research into policy making explores how policy makers’ “own values enter into the making of policy” (1979:353). Given that it is usually middle- or upper-class individuals who are able to donate their time onto policy-making boards – such as the case with COMA – the values and ‘norms’ they seek to implement in programming are often implicitly meant to make ‘them’ (the working-class) more like ‘us’ (the middle-class). Even while tracing the potentially problematic implications of value-based policy-making Wildavsky does not demonize policymakers because, he notes,

many of these patterns do not represent conscious policy choices. They result from a multitude of influences that interact in unforeseen ways: bureaucrats pursuing their own immediate objectives, federal and state legislators passing special programs, local agencies chronically short of money; the list is endless. Even where straightforward discrimination is seen there often are no villains, just a number of professionals, administering other people’s intentions along with their own, and unaware of the consequences of these professional actions. [1979:358]

Indeed, I am well aware not only of the subjective nature of policy-making but also of policy-analysis. For as Wildavsky continues,

We are the evaluators, studying the distribution of outputs precisely in order to make normative judgments. Should outputs be distributed in other ways or in different proportions? Are consequences of these outputs good (or bad) for various people differently situated? Should people who are worse off be made better off? The appearance of ‘should’ signals going beyond ‘facts into ‘values’. (1979:355)

Thus, when it came time for me to attempt to ‘sum up’ my ‘findings’ and offer some ‘conclusions’ I returned to the impetus for my original project – to bring ethnographic experiences of youth to bear on policy making endeavors. But I was stuck when it came

to offering suggestions for policy reform - not just because any suggestions I may have would be subjective and based on my own values. That is not my hesitation. Rather, I hesitate because of the futility of such efforts.

In the conclusion to his ethnography on youth's use of space in Curtisville, Herb Childress notes that, "[i]t would be both foolish and counterproductive to offer a handful of suggestions for Curtisville's layout and planning that would supposedly alleviate most of its problems" (2000:297). In this section he draws from the work of Douglas Biklen in "The Politics Of Institutions" who urges his reader to "abandon all hope of reforming institutions from within" (1977:83). For, as Biklen continues, "[t]o assume that one can instigate reform from within is to assume that closed institutions exist primarily to serve inmates and that dehumanization is an aberrant condition in an otherwise acceptable system" (ibid). I argue that in reality the marginalization Hilltown youth faced was not an aberration of the system, rather it's an integral part of the system as it is currently constructed and run. As Gordon notes,

Castel suggests that 'marginality itself, instead of remaining an unexplored or dangerous territory, can become an organized zone within the social, towards which those persons will be directed who are incapable of following more competitive pathways'...The priority for a neo-liberal government here is not indeed to annul, but rather to dissipate and disperse the mass of handicaps present in a given society. [1991: 46]

In other words, Castel and Gordon are arguing that people are actively pushed into the margins so that they may be better policed and regulated. This marginalization and regulation is in fact made possible through the construction of population categories ('youth', 'rural', 'working-class', 'queer') which are then understood and defined in particular ways. Using youth as an example, Herb Childress states,

Teenagers are defined through our civic, legal and educational institutions as a class – minors – and that class status intrudes on almost everything

they try to do. School, jobs, home, sex, curfew, parks, driving, recreation, and almost all other facets of teenage life are impacted through the legal status of ‘minor’. To class someone as a minor is to charge them with incompetence, with volatility, with the inability to manage their own affairs. [2000:270]

While being a ‘minor’ is not itself illegal, it is a quasi-legal status that is both nebulous and subject to the winds of change (i.e. a ‘minor’ facing criminal charges can be charged as an ‘adult’ if the prosecutors deem it appropriate). Like adolescence itself – ‘minor’ is what we want it to be at any given time, a cultural construction we can fit to our needs. However, when we are talking about a quasi-legal status (the minor) and their quasi-illegal activities (i.e. the public displays of leisure) certain important policy-relevant issues come to light.

Indeed, in exploring the subjective nature of policy-making, Wildavsky’s main focus is the difficulties that arise when policy problems face potential solutions. Ironically, for Wildavsky, the policy issue becomes *problematic* at the exact moment when policy makers attempt to try to resolve – rather than simply alleviate – the problem at hand. As he explains,

What is or is not a problem depends on whether it is possible to forge a link between the difficulty and the instruments available for overcoming it. Ideology enters. For actions to be considered appropriate depends both on whether those deeds are technically possible and seen as desirable. Plague indeed is a difficulty, but it is not a problem for public policy unless there are known ways of attacking it. The inequitable distribution of income is a problem only if government is able to alter it and if it is considered permissible for government to make the attempt. Deciding, then, whether a problem is or is not considered one of public policy involves not only public reaction to events but also conflict about the propriety of the government’s stepping in. (1979:353)

In terms of my own research into class and youth, the acceptability of governmental (inter)action is questionable because of the essentialized construction of these two topics.

As both class and adolescence have been conceptualized (largely through the psy-

sciences) as natural and biological realities, they are prime targets of what Foucault terms biopower.

As Foucault notes, modern power is characterized in part by its concern with biological existence; this is evidenced by the introduction of the census, population control, and matters of public health on the one side, and by genocide, state racism, and sexism on the other. To put it differently, the state cares about the biological well-being of the populace and institutes mechanisms of control to aid public health – that is, it concerns itself with promoting life – but it also treats certain groups as absolutely biological (and therefore not human) and as threats to the citizenry. At this point it is not identity that matters but the reduction of a human to biological status. [Arnold, 2008:12]

In her book *America's New Working Class: Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in a Biopolitical Age* (2008), Kathleen Arnold draws upon Giorgio Agamben's work on 'bare life' which she explains as an "extension of Michel Foucault's concept of biopower – that is, the increasing politicization of biological matters in the modern state," (2008:11). Here 'bare life' refers to,

biological life that is not abandoned by the state but that does serve as a negative identity against which citizenship is formulated...The term bare life, rather than enemy, captures the power dynamics of these 'wars' that are waged domestically against individuals who have been criminalized as *a result of their status rather than their conduct*. (ibid.- my emphasis).

Their status may be a quasi-legal classification like 'minor', or it may be non-legal classifications like 'at risk' where individuals come under scrutiny (and face intervention) by their membership in a specific population, rather than because of their behavior. Yet what is important for us to question is *who* is made to be 'bare life' – which groups are marked by their very placement in a (constructed) population? And what are the *effects* of this consignment – or, in other words, who does this benefit? What 'truths' does this solidify and naturalize?

By means of explanation, let us return to the idea of the ‘hidden population’ – the label used to define members of the Crew. As previously discussed, hidden populations are often *not hidden at all* – they are usually quite visible (which is why the difficulty of reaching such populations are all the more frustrating for researchers and policy makers). Indeed, those who have been labeled ‘hidden populations’ – queers, some members of the working-class, youth, and some people in rural areas – are in reality *marked* populations. I argue that the truly ‘hidden populations’ are those that are *not* visible to researchers or policy makers because they are able to purchase privacy via their class position. In regards to youth and sexuality, for instance, who is truly the ‘hidden population’ – the Crew who were a highly visible presence on the streets of Hilltown – or the middle-class suburban youth who do not hang out on the streets because they have a home which affords them the privacy and space in which to experiment sexually? Which group is truly off the radar for policy makers? Which group is more difficult for researchers to penetrate? And yet, contrast the answers to those questions with the answers to these: who is more studied? Which group becomes marked as a ‘population’, defined as a ‘problem’ and then become subject to intervention? In other words, the focus on studying ‘marked’ groups turns our attention away from the unmarked ‘norm’, and the ways in which class privilege may act as a buffer against the prying eyes of researchers and the state.

Indeed, as Arnold notes, “the poor have far more contact with government authorities than middle-class and wealthy individuals” (2008:29). Further, Arnold contends that the working-class is made up of “groups that are policed more often than the average citizen: through immigration surveillance, racial profiling of poor

neighborhoods, and the state's monitoring of welfare and workfare recipients" (2008:10). That the 'average citizen' Arnold references is actually the unmarked, white, middle-class citizen goes without saying. But what does need to be said – what begs to be made explicit here – is that on a very basic level being poor or working-class means being subject to surveillance, and governmental intervention (read: interference) that the middle-class are able – both metaphorically and literally – to 'buy' themselves out of. And, perhaps most crucially, this works to maintain class difference and hierarchy by putting the focus on those that who are marginalized by class hierarchy, rather than those who privilege from it.

An example of this is offered in Kadi's discussion of environmental activism during the 1970s and 1980s. In particular Kadi recounts activists that targeted fishermen in Newfoundland who had been clubbing seals. As she notes, "I hated what happened to the seals. Just as much as I hated what happened to the fishermen. Having visited Newfoundland and seen the poverty, I had no quarrel with the fishermen. *Why didn't activists challenge the people who had the power to change the situation?*" (1997:36 – my emphasis). She continues by exploring the *effects* of this focus on the 'marked' population, noting,

This problematic politic reinforced a viewpoint traditionally fostered by the ruling class – that of stupid, unenlightened, backward workers. Now middle-class activists reinforced and strengthened this belief. In the peace movement, activists denounced workers for taking jobs at munitions plants. In the environmental movement, activists denounced selfish loggers for not caring about the spotted owl. *I rarely heard owners criticized and called to account...* The media, owned by the ruling class, happily took notes about selfish loggers and offered prominent airtime. Corporate owners sat complacently behind the scenes. As usual. [1997:36]

Kadi explores this type of media coverage where the “focus is directed away from the harmful, retrograde, and oppressive ideas of the ruling class and toward workers...[and] organizers act as unthinking accomplices to the ruling class” (ibid.). Here she is articulating the *privilege of invisibility* given to the ruling class: because they have the capital to purchase privacy they can remain ‘behind the scenes’ in media accounts, and – perhaps more importantly - off the radar of many governmental policies and programs.

A response to this idea may be the argument that the middle- or ruling-class doesn’t need ‘help’ and thus they do not need governmental programs or policies meant to give what is viewed primarily as *economic* aid. But what Arnold pushes us to explore is the “*moral* basis of welfare, workfare and the treatment of the poor more generally” (2008:18). As she notes, “[f]amily caps, workfare, antiabortion legislation, the promotion of heterosexual, two-parent families, and the decreasing well-being of welfare and workfare recipients are *evidence that what is at stake is not improving the lot of the poor but controlling and ‘re-engineering’ them*” (2008:19). Re-engineering ‘them’ to be more like ‘us’, as Arnold states that “[t]he implementation of increasingly moralistic policies for the working poor and welfare recipients is then justified by the notion that ‘we’ all adhere to the same values” (2008:28) – values which are inherently classed – and ones which the poor and working-class are ‘made’ to ‘buy into’ through their participation in these programs. As Arnold contends,

In fact, these programs should be viewed in the same terms as parole – the recipient is not merely a client, an individual whose transaction with a bureaucracy has a beginning and end. Rather, like parole, welfare entails strict adherence to rules (including the monitoring of one’s sexual activities and limits to the number of children one can have), and *close scrutiny of what are normally considered private details*. [2008:41 – my emphasis]

Still it remains clear that in the current socio-political climate, ‘privacy’ is a commodity to be purchased – not a right to be given. As Henderson notes regarding activism in the queer community, “the sphere of intimate life is now the real political prize, the seat of campaigns and political mobilization” (Manuscript:31). Yet those who inhabit marked identities (be they sexual, economic, age-based or geographic) have never (been) afforded the luxury of the ‘private sphere’.

Indeed, the division between the ‘private’ and the ‘public’ spheres gained prominence as a concept during industrialization – a historical moment which, one could argue, laid the groundwork for the construction of all the marked identities tackled in this dissertation (the ‘adolescent’, the ‘rural’, the ‘working-class’, the ‘queer’). I’ll explore each briefly in turn.

Returning to the work of Critical Youth Scholar Christine Griffin (reviewed in chapter 2), I remind the reader of her contention that, “most of the changes in young peoples’ lives which laid the foundations for the ‘discovery’ of adolescence occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century with the onset of industrialization,” (1993:13). These changes included the decline of domestic industries as factory production in cities expanded - which would come to construct the dichotomy of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’. Kath Weston contends that this is indeed a false dichotomy as, “[m]ost symbolic contrasts between city and country depend upon an idealized portrait of the two as separate, self-contained spaces. Yet the factories, mines, and country markets in rural areas could not exist without being integrated into larger economic and political relations,” (1998:41-42). At the same time, as Rose reminds us, industrialization brought poor workers into close proximity with urban elites, creating the conditions for the construction of a ‘working-

class’ which seemed to have its ‘own’ set of morals, values and ‘hygienic practices’ – ones that the elites set out to bring into line with *their* values. Lastly, industrialization and the resultant migration to urban areas is argued by some to be the key to the invention of homosexuality as an *identity* rather than a behavior (see for instance Chauncy, 1995).

While it is interesting to see the connection between the historical construction of these different subject positions, and the types of interventions those inhabiting them have been subject to, I want to end this section with two points. First, *class trumps*. Which is to say that in my research I found that similarities in class position overcame any differences among youth regarding ‘other’ identities – including sexual identities – and it was the inability to purchase privacy that marked this population and subjected them to state surveillance and regulation. As a privileged researcher I was continually shocked at the treatment of these youth: even as I came to know better some of the struggles of a life lived in the economic margins, each day brought new shocks that I couldn’t have imagined the day before. Importantly, what I ultimately learned through my reactions was the fact of my own privilege. It’s not just that I learned I was privileged, rather I came (slowly) to understand how privilege works to protect itself. In other words, my class privilege ran deep and coupled with the lack of real discussions about class differences in our society – it was almost impossible to think myself out of it. Or, as Walter Benjamin states, “the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of exception’ in which we live is the rule”.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Quoted in Arnold (2008:72).

Second, in regards to policy reform, the one suggestion I want to make is that policy makers need to construct programs with no strings attached – no intake forms, no recording of names and social security numbers, no mandated parental notification. That this would – indeed, *could* – never happen in the way our system is currently constructed and funded - is a given and leaves me with a perspective that I think the Crew would agree with: the entire system needs to be dismantled. As I write these words I can almost hear a collective sigh of relief from the Crew: “finally the privileged anthropologist *gets it!*” and this makes me smile, because it was the Crew that would ultimately have the biggest impact on how I came to understand the limitations of this research long after I left the field. And so I want to return here to the Crew and to the lessons they taught me about ethnographic collaboration and the (im)possibilities of policy change.

“Eh, Good Luck!”: What The Crew Taught Me About Research, Policy &

Collaboration

We take for granted that the purpose of social inquiry in the 1990s is not only to generate new knowledge but to reform ‘common sense’ and inform critically public policies, existent social movements, and daily community life. A commitment to such ‘application’, however, should not be taken for granted. This is a(nother) critical moment in the life of the social sciences, one in which individual scholars are today making decisions about the extent to which our work should aim to be ‘useful’.
[Fine &Weis 2003:124]

While I had come to this research with the plan to make my findings relevant to policy makers, academics and *the youth participants themselves*, my work with the Crew threw a wrench in all my good intentions. For in the Crew I came to know a group of youth who had been told (both literally and symbolically – and over and over again) that they didn’t matter: they were told this sometimes by parents, sometimes by teachers and

sometimes by community members – and they were told it enough times that most came to believe it. They didn't think they mattered, and they didn't think most other things mattered either. That included this research project.

Indeed, though the Crew members were generous in giving their time and talk to Birdie (and sometimes to me) this seemed most of the time to be something they did because they were friends with Birdie, or because they thought I was 'okay' for an outsider, or because they were bored. But it's not something they did because they thought the project mattered. This is illustrated in Birdie's interview with Stevo where she ended, as she had come to do in all her interviews, by giving the interviewee the chance to say anything they wanted to. She did this with Stevo, asking, "alright what did I miss? Anything you want to say that's important to know?". His response was "no, I don't think anything I said was really important," then he paused and added, "*Your research probably isn't really important either.*" When transcribing this interview it was Birdie's response to this comment that interested me, as she agreed with him, stating, "I don't think it is" and continued, "why don't you think it's important?". Stevo asked her "what's it for?" and Birdie articulately described the project and myself and the benefits of ethnographic methodologies and even my goals for the research ("she's interested in changing policy"). At this comment Stevo actually laughed out loud and said, "*with her research???* Eh...Good luck!" - a comment I would come to appreciate, and in many ways resonate with, years later while 'writing up'.

But that wasn't the end of the story – or the interview. No, the tape ended with Birdie – Crew member and co-researcher – saying, "yeah this research work is really strange. *It makes me feel like shit about my life when I look at it in that concrete reality*

sense of what the world is like and the place that I'm at and what the fuck am I gonna do with my life. It's pretty strange." This was an honest thing for her to say and a profound thing for me to hear, because in my well-intentioned attempt to do collaborative research – for all the methodological training, the analytic training, the practice interviews we had done together – I hadn't thought about what it might be like for Birdie to engage with me in an analysis of the Crew's situation that might not have a very happy 'ending'. While I had – in some ways - talked her through some of the quandaries of conducting research among her friends (the process), I hadn't thought to prepare her for her own reactions to our findings (the products). Indeed, when we started the project I didn't even imagine that there would be an emotional fallout to the research project - for either Birdie *or* for me - but there was, for both of us – and it's something that demands attention because it speaks to the differences in our positionality – in particular in our class positionality – which, well once again all I can say here is: class trumped. By means of explanation, I return briefly to Michelle Tea's analysis of *Nickled and Dimed*.

Indeed, Tea argues that books like *Nickled and Dimed* and other mainstream publications about the working-class experience, are illustrations *about* the working-class but *by* the middle-class. Even as Tea notes the good intentions of these types of projects about working-class experiences, she also articulates the complexities at play in her own intellectual and emotional responses to this work. As Tea writes,

I try, I really do, to keep the cynicism and general bad attitude I have toward Ehrenreich's book in check. Truly her intentions were noble – to sink into the world of the minimum-wage worker, emerge with first-hand proof that it is a rough world, an impossible, soul-slaughtering existence. The problem, perhaps, is not her project itself, or even the fact that she was terribly well paid to be poor for a while. Perhaps the reason I found my cracked teeth gritting and my stomach scrambling with frustration while I read is that I couldn't believe this was news, a bit hit, a bestseller.

Duh, I thought, again and again, leafing through the book. Of course minimum-wage work is bone-crushing drudgery, difficult to live on, even more difficult to get out of. Why did it take a middle-class woman on a well-paid slumming vacation to break this news to the world? [2003:xiii-xiv]

So too does Elizabeth Chin identify a social amnesia in academic research on poverty.

As she notes,

In the late 1960s Jonathan Kozol's descriptions of the ferocity of economic and racial oppression in Boston public schools (Kozol, 1967) were a revelatory slap in the face; nearly thirty years later his *Savage Inequalities* (Kozol, 1991) surprised and angered the public afresh – and with no apparent sensation of collective déjà vu. These accounts are moving and important, but I am continually mystified by the assertion...that they speak about something we did not know before. [2001:28]

Both Tea and Chin also push us to think about who is the intended audience of much work on poverty. In terms of mainstream narratives, Tea writes,

Poor people are always left out of the intellectual conversation, despite being the subjects of entire books. In *Nickle and Dimed*, Ehrenreich, a successful middle-class woman, speaks directly to other middle-class people. This happens frequently in books and articles about working-class people – it is assumed that none of us will be reading the text. It's a decidedly creepy experience to read about your life like this, passed from one middle-class perception to another. It's like being talked about in a room where you sit, invisible. It's a game of intellectual keep-away, the words lobbed over your head, but worse – no one even knows you're trying to get in on the game. It doesn't even occur to them that you could play. [2003:XIV]

Of course, the same may be said about much academic writing – as Chin notes that the history of ethnographic work on poverty,

has had the effect of making it appear as if it is primarily the educated (white) middle class that has the tools for critically examining modern consumer culture, and hearkens back to nineteenth-century European beliefs that 'primitive man' spent so much time attempting to scrape together some food, clothing, and shelter that 'he' had no time to engage in philosophizing, creating religion, making music or art. [2001:28]

This is similar to what people have argued about youth – that they are not ‘developed’ enough to think critically or utilize discourses strategically - ideas which have underscored some of the early work on youth. In contrast, critical youth researchers have argued that

We need to challenge the belief that our informants lack insight and awareness. We need to stop building these ideas into our research methods. And we need to stop overwriting their voices with our own. If we are able to produce accounts which we can actually learn from, accounts fleshed out and informed by insiders’ lived meanings and values, then we need to start granting them the ability and opportunity to tell us their story. [MacDonald 2001, 232-233]

Indeed, work in youth studies often subsumes youth voices into the (even well intentioned) adult discourses *about* adolescence, in the same way that Tea and others note that the working-class are written *about* by the middle-class.

In contrast to the ‘authenticity of experience’ (Scott, 1991) granted in other work on other *othered* populations, both the Adolescent Experience and the Working-Class Experience are not only essentialized by tragedy and victimization or romantic resistances, they are also authored by those whose experience is (arguably) in-authentic – by adults taking a vacation to Adolescentville or middle-class people visiting the Land of the Working-Class. In what Tea refers to as ‘slumming vacations’ middle-class tourists/ethnographers/journalists buy a day pass to an amusement park we might call the Working-Class Experience. Like a rollercoaster ride, visitors step across the class threshold and enter into another ‘world’ of strange, new (and sometimes scary) graphic scenery and sudden death-defying drops in gravity. And then the ride ends, the tourists exit, and all is well. The experience can be written about, theorized and nicely packaged precisely because the ‘ride’ *ends*. But Tea pushes us to consider – for lack of a better term – the ‘native’ perspectives, the ‘indigenous’ experiences of the working-class,

asking, “Where are the voices of the poor people who don’t get to leave these lives when the story is completed? The people whose stories generally don’t get completed?” (2003:XIV). Similarly, youth researchers have called for a focus on youth experiences as narrated – and understood – by youth themselves.

This sounds to me similar to the anthropological ethnographic project that seeks to uncover the ‘native experience’. Yet even with the focus on participant-observation, which has come to characterize anthropological ethnography in particular - through my project I came to understand how we never fully *participate* – it’s the impossibility of ‘going native’ – as much as we might try. The best way for me to explain it is that sometimes anthropology can look a little like the ‘It’s A Small World’ ride at Walt Disney World. If you’ve never been on it, allow me to describe the experience of this ride: after waiting in a long and winding line with a bunch of other sweaty t-shirt clad tourists you file onto a ‘boat’ shaped like a giant gondola with several rows of seats, which jerks and jolts out onto the tracks in a watery ‘canal’ that ‘sails around the world’. You float along to various ‘countries’ populated with small animated dolls dressed in ethnic garb which rotate and wave while singing *It’s A Small World After All*...The ride is designed so that the song plays continuously, providing constant background and a seamless transition as you turn and twist around these essentialized cultures. The message is pretty basic – though the song may be sung with a different accent or in an entirely different language as you travel across the globe – the tourist learns that the song – and thus the singers – are all the same...*after all*. The ethnographic project can sometimes read, similarly, as an illustration of the basic humanity of, well, humanity.

And those of us who take the journey of the ethnographic process - most of the time we're on that boat-that-is-not-a-boat, just passing through.

But sometimes we are allowed a little bit more – sometimes we get to don a costume and momentarily become a part of one of those groups of small wooden dolls in ‘ethnic’ garb rotating and waving and singing *It's a small world afterall* to the tourists on the ride. In those instances we may experience a split or double consciousness in the most privileged of senses: we know what it is to be a tourist – we know the view from the boat – but in these moments we may be lucky enough to scratch the phenomenological surface, to experientially inhabit these positions for just a moment and get just a little sense of ‘how it feels’ on this side of the ride. It is because of these moments that I get caught up in my writing - caught *metaphorically*, as an outsider, a trespasser, a tourist with a day pass – and literally – I get caught up, unable to make heads or tails of the experience, and to theorize about it somehow? Ha! In particular, there were two times when I played this kind of ethnographic ‘dress up’. And I stop here to write about them (or the impossibility of writing about them) because they are central for me in terms of understanding the limits and potentials of cross-age and *cross-class* collaborative ethnography like the one I undertook with Birdie.

False Pos(i)tures: Ethnographic Conclusions and the ‘Authenticity of Experience’

I think of all the gifts I have received in my work as an ethnographer and I realize I cannot ever repay those who have given away their stories to me without tasking for anything in return. Although fable of rapport are routinely dismissed in contemporary anthropology as romantic and naïve, I have not yet become jaded enough to cease thinking that the ability to do our work as ethnographers depends on people being willing to talk to us freely and give us the gift of their stories. Of course, the stories are given in a context of complex intersubjective negotiations and exchanges, mutual expectations and desires informed by obvious power differences,

in which the ethnographer, at a minimum, promises to maintain the social obligation of staying connected to her informants. [Behar, 1997:6]

In the following section I wish to describe two instances where I played ‘ethnographic dress up’ in my research – each time trying on the ‘identities’ of two different youth ‘informants’: Birdie and Jane. Because I maintain close relationships of the kind Behar discusses with both of these individuals, I have the privilege of reflecting upon these experiences in my own words as well as through the writings of Birdie and Jane themselves. Indeed, many years after the research ‘ended’ these two former youth-researchers-turned-friends once again gave me the gift of their time and their stories.

Part One: The Backpack

It was what Birdie might call an even ‘skuzzier’ version of Eichenrich, my sad (ad)venture into the shoes of the ‘the native’ (as though that’s even ever possible) but still...

There was a costume change. I mean, I didn’t think of it like that at the time, but that’s what it was. Putting on Birdie’s ‘semiotics’ (à la Hebdige) and exploring the experience of identity – both actual *and* ascribed – through the physical signs and symbols of her clothing ‘style’ in general but particularly through just one physical artifact of hers – a single piece of material culture: the backpack.

Birdie had come to my house for a night of fun, hanging out, playing music, and making art when it turned into a fashion show and then a photo shoot – and then the decision to go for a late night walk into town. With me wearing her backpack. This one piece of material culture (in a sense mirroring the earlier stories about the bench or the t-shirt) revealed so much – about the research project, about the limitations of ethnographic

experience and writing, about the ‘hidden injuries of class’ I think I inflicted on Birdie that night.

What happened? Well, we went for a walk downtown, with this backpack that Birdie had been wearing for a little under two months. It contained her ‘life’ and all the material artifacts she might need on any given day. She was homeless – but that term is so weird to use, because as a Crew member she was more literally a couch-surfer, sometimes (out of necessity) a “moocher” – all the time literally carrying her life on her shoulders, never having a place to rest it (metaphorically) or literally as even with couch surfing among Crew members apartments she couldn’t leave her bag with all her necessary and worldly possessions just lying around. Also, even if a crashpad was a safe space to store her backpack during the day, it also tied her to that physical location and ensured that she would need to find a way back there that day before traveling onto her next couch or what not, and without a car – well, one could see that that may pose a problem.

That night I put on the backpack on and nearly fell over at the weight of it. It was easily 50 pounds (more likely close to 60), with Birdie herself clocking in at just about 120 pounds (if that). She seemed amused at first with this – this person trying on her ‘life’ in a very literal (and heavy) way. *I cannot believe you wear this around all the time*, I said, as with every moment of it on my back I hurt more and more. Somehow I got the idea to go downtown, and try out this identity in a more public way. (In retrospect I think everything changed when we left the house and made this public). But before we did so, as I stood marveling at myself in the mirror (‘oh my god, look, I’m

Birdie’) how easily I could look like (an older) crew member. Birdie, in contrast, wore my yellow Target cutesy girly jacket and carried my purse and proclaimed ‘I’m Kaila!’.

For that night, in just the most aesthetic and superficial of ways – we could try on each others’ identities. True to form, I was shocked by the reaction I got from people walking down the street (friends didn’t recognize me, strangers actually avoided me). This was just the tiniest glimpse into Birdie’s life-world, and as her following reflection on that night illustrates – it did nothing to erase my privilege. Indeed, my privilege is what blinded me to both the realities of Birdie’s day-to-day life as a couch surfer, as well as to the effects this little ‘game’ of dress up may have for Birdie herself.

My Backpack: By Birdie

“The life-world is the world of our immediately lived experience, *as* we live it, prior to all our thoughts about it. It is that which is present to us in our everyday tasks and enjoyments - reality as it engages us before being analyzed by our theories and our science. (Abram, David)”

I wish not to reflect upon the life-world of couch surfing, there is no way to condense my experiences into letters on paper that could accurately convey the lived reality of those two months. However at Kaila’s request, I will do my best to give an account of being ‘home-free’.

No work to be found, no apartments affordable. I was home free. Living as a turtle knows best. With all I needed on my back, yet my physical and mental form much weaker than that of a turtle’s, I struggled to maintain health, strength, and contentment through chaos.

It was an experience that fell into my lap when I had no other option, and the only way to get through each day was to consciously choose to remember that this too would

pass. That one day I would not be carrying a fifty-pound backpack in the late winter months of rural New England.

No matter the reality of sore feet and a tired spine, dirty underwear and less than ideal sleeping arrangements night to night, it was all I could do. I was ever so grateful for the family of friends that (despite what little they had for how hard they worked) took me in with more hospitality than that of my own blood.

I made sure not to overstay my welcome at any one location, moving each night to a different apartment, even if I would be back to the same place a week from then, it isn't in the couch surfing etiquette to literally make oneself at home. Instead it is a delicate balance of being resourceful and respectful. To wake on ones couch and pretend you have better places to be while they went about their routine. I often spent days at the library taking refuge in a book and a place to shit without using toilet paper that already had to be bought so frequently by the households whom allowed friends to crash. Hot water isn't free either, so I never asked to take a shower. Whore baths took away some degree of offense from my odor that had permeated all of that which I wore and carried.

Throughout everyday, all day, I craved the good nights rest I hadn't gotten the night before, still tired from attempting to sleep on an armchair, floor, or shared pull out couch (with another wretched smelling crusty kid) where the springs do just that into your wrecked back. And those whom had beds to sleep in were able to outlast the clock striking midnight, which meant this was also expected of me. Another tip in couch surfing etiquette: If one has nothing to offer besides good company, than good company one must provide. I would shoot the shit while crying and begging on the inside for people to just hurry up and fucking retire for the night, I didn't even know what I was

talking about anymore as people gathered around drinking and joking. My head simultaneously spinning and throbbing, body aching. I would hold conversations through yawns while stretching my limbs and rubbing my shoulders where the straps weighed heaviest throughout the day.

Community members noticed my tired presence and unfortunate predicament. In one instance an older man whose name was unknown to me but face was familiar, approached me about my backpack. Obviously I was not camping out in February. He questioned me about how dangerous couch surfing was. Making me more aware of my vulnerable appearance. He questioned me about my family history, educational background and practically harassed me while at heart having the best intentions.

“Where’s your father in all of this?” He asked, oblivious to my discomfort with the conversation. I answered each of his questions flatly, unenthused. He apologized for not offering to buy me lunch when he saw me earlier that day in the sub shop. I told him I had been full, with contempt in my hungry voice.

I didn’t need his concern or advice about how I needed to be in school again. He told me he would take it upon himself to fulfill the role of my neglectful father by asking me sarcastically how school was going each time he saw me. I wanted to tell him to just fucking cut me a check if he really cared about my education. Simply alerting me daily about my educational abilities or lack thereof wouldn’t do shit besides foster more discomfort about my circumstances.

By the time this man walked away from the street bench which I was simply trying to rest and read upon, with no home to hide myself in, I was in tears and

scrambling up and onward, hoisting my bag on myself and retreating to the barren winter woods which I was beginning to relate so well to.

For the trees were being built around, and cut down and built upon. The ground where once stood an elder, now denoted as a potential wifi zone. I was growing sick with discomfort in the human life-world. I took solace in the strengths of nature to continue its course despite lack of respect and humbleness from the human inhibitors.

Conversations with others became trivial. I didn't give a shit about the latest blockbuster or who was hooking up with so and so. I would much rather listen to the babbling of a brook with wisdom winding from hundreds of years of interdependent organisms, cultivating harmony and beauty seemingly effortlessly. Serpentine in it's structure, able to navigate new ways, be flexible and continue onward.

Toward the end of my two-month adventure with couch surfing, I went to stay a couple of nights at Kaila's apartment. I upgraded to an inflatable mattress (!) but not after fulfilling my role as good company.

Upon arrival, my back was in the worst shape yet. Simply walking was a struggle. Each day my backpack seemed to grow heavier and my body weaker. I had managed to stay somewhat healthy; catching the flu was NOT an option. I had loaded up on Echinacea and Vitamin C, as eating extremely well proved difficult. Cheap equaled good and I had been getting by on primarily bagels and pizza.

Kaila seemed oblivious to exactly what my physical/mental capacities were the first night I came to stay, she was bubbly and energetic, while I was sure that I felt the way an eighty year old woman would feel after getting thrown down a flight of stairs, and

kicked in the back. But nevertheless I did hold myself with the obligation to provide at least decent company for a few hours before passing out.

Kaila was determined to try on my backpack and experiment with wearing it out in the world. Glorifying the horror of the reality that I was ready to abandon. The process even in choosing an outfit to portray herself as a backpacker was tedious. She thought she could borrow something from me, but all I had reeked of cigarettes and sweat, and I didn't have much compared to her closets and bureaus that were plentiful in clean clothes.

Half an hour later we set out for Kaila's debut backpacking escapade. I became increasingly uncomfortable/irritated by the complaining that her back hurt after ten minutes, but kept my mouth zipped. We have vastly differing life-worlds, and I didn't expect for this half an hour stroll to instill a profound sense of my everyday perceptions and participation in the couch surfing reality. Rather I guessed perhaps that it would instigate her awareness about her *lack* of awareness on this subject matter.

I guess I'm a good sport (or enjoy being a tortured soul) because we even ended up going out dancing that night after meeting up unexpectedly with people we knew. Or more so they danced while I drank and kept making sure that the backpack with all of my belongings was still by the door of the club, which we hadn't been allowed to bring in.

The departure from the club resulted in Kaila remembering that she still had my backpack to carry and she pissed and moaned while I tried to focus on my breath and maintain a positive disposition. No need to focus on the pain. I was in survival mode with the rest of the natural world.

The next day I woke up crying from the pain my body was in. I had muted my bodies discomfort for so long. Even if I had been a better listener, there still wouldn't have been anything I could have done to respond to my body's wails. Only when the pain was great enough that tears flooded my eyes despite how much I tried to blink them back and it was noticeable to others did I realize that I *really needed* rest.

Upon Kaila's insistence that I go to the E.R. a couple of days later, it was determined that I had a pinched nerve and was not to lift anything for a couple of months. Now, four months later I still feel the effects of those backpacking months on my body. It was one of the more taxing experiences I have had the pleasure to endure. At 120 pounds carrying nearly half my body's weight, the backpack grounded me to my roots. I could feel the substance of myself fully with every step. With no home base, I began to feel more comfortable being in any environment I came into contact with. Being forced to participate with my immediate environment no matter what it brought has made me ever so grateful for my participation and perceptions within my given life-world.

Part Two: "Work" by Jane

September 2009

I wake up at noon and my body is still so sore from working late and it's already time to get ready to go back to work. I open my dresser drawer and pick one from the dozens of nearly identical tight, black, low-cut tops that show just enough but not too much. Just enough to draw the customer's attention but still leave them wondering and interested. A push-up bra with an under wire is crucial. Then make-up. I don't want to over do it and appear sleazy, like I'm trying too hard, so I stick to the basics- black

eyeliner and pink lip-gloss the same shade as my natural lip color, to add a little pop. I like my hair to look messy and used but somewhat controlled and intentional and I pin it out of my eyes with bobby-pins that are barely noticeable in my dark brown hair. I grab a pair of tight jeans and sensible shoes- they hopefully won't be paying attention to my feet. I take a satisfactory look at myself in the mirror and think, "yeah, I'd fuck me. This is good enough."

I rummage under laundry to find my shoulder bag. I have to carry a big bag so I can bring clothes for after work- clothes I'd never wear to work and for obvious reasons. #1: they're more comfortable. #2: After working half way into the night I like to put on clothes that don't smell like what I've been doing at work. And #3: I don't want any of my customers to recognize me when I'm walking home at nearly two thirty in the morning. Being recognized can be both annoying and dangerous.

I grab a pair of slightly looser fitting jeans, a black sports bra, a black and white striped tank top (my favorite) and a faded grey hoodie that has a patch from my friend's band sewn haphazardly on the back. I stuff it all in my bag and by then it's time to leave. I sleep late most days because this job is so tiring, physically and emotionally, so I don't usually have much of day before I have to go back to work. I sling my bag over my shoulder, filled with my "civilian clothes" and make-up for touch ups and I walk to work. Even though it's only a ten minute walk (I live right downtown), I pass by about half a dozen customers on my way there. They smile at me knowingly (but honestly, they have no idea) or they whisper a little too loudly their friends, "that's that girl who works..." When I started out in this town, I liked feeling famous and known for something, but now, after over three years, I'd kill for some anonymity.

I like to get there a few minutes early to scope out the scene, see if it's been busy. I get there, check the time, and put away my bag. I've been doing this long enough that I can look at a customer and before we even interact, I can gauge how they want me to act. It's all in the way they carry themselves when they're looking at me. For instance, some people need me to be a dumb little girl, so they can feel older and wiser. Some just want me to be a robot, no interaction, really, just do my job fast so they can get in and out. They're so busy and important. (For those people, I think, "why didn't they just do this at home?" But then I wouldn't have a job.)

After work most nights, the others and I like to go out for at least one drink together. You'd need a drink too if you had to do what we do for nine hours a day for not nearly as much as we're worth, plus the shitty tips people give. They're almost more insulting than they are necessary. Two percent tip? Really? But the big tippers sometimes have a way of making you feel even cheaper. They make this huge deal out of it, like, "And here's a little extra for you, for making my day!" Ew. Gross.

I assume my position, posing where I'm supposed to stand and wait for my first customer of the day. I make eye contact as he walks toward me. He gives me an obvious up and down look and I smile and sweetly ask, "What would you like, sir?" Unsmiling, he replies, "Large latte."

Service Work: How an Anthropologist Learns Her Place

During the process of writing up my dissertation I got a job at the same café that Jane works at (indeed, she *helped* me get that job). This was my introduction to the 'service industry', a mythical place I had often heard Jane and my other young friends who worked in this field talk about. Most often the way they described it was similar to

Jane's story above – they compared it to sex work, to 'selling themselves' – and they told me many stories which were funny on the surface but which revealed the 'subtle humiliations' (Bourgois, 1995) those in the service industry had come to experience as a naturalized part of their jobs.

I was hired at Jane's café to be a hostess – and as such I was not really on the 'front lines' of the service industry: I wasn't sweating in the non-air-conditioned kitchen, I wasn't burning myself on the espresso maker's steam wand. Rather, I was hired (at a higher rate of pay than either kitchen or barista staff) to dress nicely, greet people at the door and escort them to their tables. During my first few weeks I absolutely loved the job. In contrast to the solitary and sedentary nature of dissertation writing, I loved the movement – the hustle and bustle – and the interactions I got to have with customers.

Until.

Until the first time I had a customer look me up and down and decide they were better than me because I was waiting on them. Until the first time I had a customer speak to me like I was retarded – or worse, like I was the perfect punching bag upon which they could act out the frustrations of their day. Until I jumped on the register at the coffee bar when they were particularly busy and helped the baristas by ringing up the orders. Enter a distinguished looking gentleman, around the age of fifty, with a pretty female companion. He ordered a small cup of coffee and a cookie. *That'll be 3.25* I told him, and I took his five dollar bill and handed him back his change (which he – of course – did not put in the tip jar prominently displayed next to the cash register). And then he asked for a receipt – which was annoying because 1) he spent less than five dollars and 2) he didn't tell me he wanted a receipt before, when he was paying, and so I needed to figure

out how to get the computer operating system to locate his order and print the receipt. It wasn't *that* big of a deal, but when I hit 'reprint receipt' nothing happened (because, it turns out, receipts print out on the second shelf at the coffee bar – something I didn't know because I never worked the coffee bar register). At any rate I apologized and said 'oh, sorry, hold on let me figure out how to do this'. And this man – this stranger who I had never met before, who didn't know me from Eve – looked at me with a smirk and said *yeah, it looks like it takes a lot of specialized knowledge to work that computer system.*

I paused for a moment and just looked at him, trying to figure out why someone would think it was acceptable to speak to another human being in this way. The first thought that jumped into my head, what I wanted to say back to him was 'No, it takes a lot of specialized knowledge to get a Ph.D. in Anthropology, which is what I am doing when I'm not waiting on douchebags like you'. But of course I couldn't say that. And what I realized was that my knee-jerk reaction was to offer up my 'other' life (my 'real' job) as evidence that I wasn't stupid. That I shouldn't have to do that goes without saying. And that most of the youth who work in the service industry *can't* do that – as there is often no 'other' more 'respectable' job to fall back on – helped me to understand, once again, my privilege. Sure I could (play) dress up, work as a hostess, and swap stories about bullshit treatment by customers over a beer with my co-workers after my shift was done. But my stint in the service world was only that – a stint – and so I could only scratch the phenomenological surface of this experience where the humiliation, (emotional) violence and verbal abuse that I faced didn't carry the same weight as those who 'truly' worked in the service industry, like Jane.

And so, when it was all said and done, I came to understand that despite my best intentions cross-class collaborations could only go so far. Thus in following postscript, Birdie and I will reflect upon our collaboration – opening up a discussion we hope will take place in anthropology and youth studies regarding the process and products produced in cross-generational ethnographic collaborations.

POSTSCRIPT

“A CURIOUS PIECE OF WORK”: REFLECTIONS ON COLLABORATION AND ETHNOGRAPHY

The title for this postscript is taken from the preface of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, James Agee and Walker Evans' exploration into the lives of sharecroppers and tenement farmers during the Great Depression. Agee's poetic yet tortured introduction to this work is concerned with the methods of his endeavor, the "curious, obscene, terrifying, and unfathomably mysterious" (1941:24) process of the research he and Evans undertook. While not a traditional ethnography, Agee's introduction manages, in just a few gut-wrenching pages, to touch upon all the 'problematics' of ethnographic inquiry as he stumbles through the stages of his project; struggling first with the circumstances that initially brought him to the research, and then in turn with his methods, his relationships with his collaborator and his 'subjects' and ultimately to the purpose and limitations of the 'finished' product. After brutal meditations on each of these aspects Agee writes the following excerpt towards the end of his introduction, a passage which for me encapsulates, in short form, the contours of a struggle which seem no more settled for all his prior consideration and reflection. As he explains,

I realize that, with even so much involvement in explanation as this, I am liable seriously, and perhaps irretrievably, to obscure what would at best be hard enough to give its appropriate clarity and intensity; and what seems to me most important of all: namely, *that these I will write of are human beings, living in this world*, innocent of such twistings as these which are taking place over their heads; *and that they were dwelt among, investigated, spied on, revered, and loved, by other quite monstrously alien human beings*, in the employment of still others still more alien; and

that they are now being looked into by still others, who have picked up their living as casually as if it were a book, and who were actuated toward this reading by various possible reflexes of sympathy, curiosity, idleness, et cetera, and almost certainly in a lack of consciousness, and conscience, remotely appropriate to the enormity of what they are doing. (1941:28 – my emphasis)

Agee's reaction to such unwittingly ignorant responses was to resist the very medium in which it could (would?) be produced – the text. As he notes (pleads?),

If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and excrement. Booksellers would consider it quite a novelty; critics would murmur, yes, but is it art; and I could trust a majority of you to use it as you would a parlor game. A piece of the body torn out by the roots might be more to the point. (ibid.).

And then he retreats back – knowing of the impossibility of this kind of representation – to the only means of expression he has: words. Words to describe that which he believes or feels cannot be put into words. His surrender is evident, as he says, “As it is, though, I'll do what little I can in writing,”. But his resistance to the words – to the writing itself – remains, as he notes, “Only it will be very little,”. By means of explanation, or warning he continues, “*I'm not capable of it; and if I were, you would not go near it at all. For if you did, you would hardly bear to live. As a matter of fact, nothing I might write could make any difference whatever. It would only be a 'book' at the best.* (1941:28 – my emphasis).

As I read these words while in ‘the field’ I came to believe that Agee had poetically captured the classic existential crisis of ethnography, while predating the anthropological ‘crisis of representation’ and its ensuing debates by over four decades. While I was well-versed in these later deliberations over both the ‘politics of poesis’ and then later still, the politics of the *process* of ethnography – I found in Agee a raw,

unfiltered account of a man who had nothing to fall back on – no stockpile of quotes by anthropologists regarding the politics and process of ethnographic research, no theories of collaboration or methods of research that could help him out of the murky waters in which he found himself. And while I *did*, as an anthropologist conducting fieldwork in the mid 2000s, have all of those things (the quotes, the experiences of those who came before me), as I found myself wading knee-deep through the ethnographic process, there was not a single piece of anthropological writing that resonated with me as much as the introduction to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. I carried that book through much of my fieldwork – retreated into it when I was overwhelmed, and even used it as a tool of inquiry – sharing it with Birdie and together analyzing it in relation to our experience.

For like Agee, I too had company on much of my voyage. In his endeavor Agee was accompanied by the famous photographer Walker Evans (to whom Agee writes a poem in his introduction, referring to him as both a ‘fellow spy’ and a ‘comrade’), and the product is a collaboration between them. Agee discusses the different tools each brings to the project as he describes the camera and the written word as the two ‘immediate instruments’, while “the governing instrument – which is also one of the centers of the subject – is individual, anti-authoritative human consciousness,” (1941:8). Yet he conceptualizes himself and Evans both as ‘authors’ noting, crucially, that “the photographs are not illustrative. They, and the text, are *coequal, mutually independent, and fully collaborative*. By their fewness, and by the impotence of the reader’s eye, this will be misunderstood by most of that minority which does not wholly ignore it,” (ibid. my emphasis). Likewise, my collaboration with Birdie, while seemingly just one aspect of the project is, in many ways, *the project in and of itself*. Indeed, while our

collaboration began as an analytic tool it soon became an analytic object. Like Evans photographs, Birdie's contributions and our collaboration may seem more minor than they really are. In reality, not only did our collaboration change the course of the research project, it also *became* the project; making this work not only an ethnography of these youth lives but also an ethnography of doing ethnography.

Agee describes his and Evans' project as the "virulent, insolent, deceitful, pitying, infinitesimal and frenzied running and searching, on this colossal peasant map, of two angry, futile and bottomless, botched and over-complicated youthful intelligences in the service of an anger and of a love and of an indiscernible truth," (1941:25). Such was the case also with myself and Birdie. As I noted in the introduction, ours was a collaboration fraught with both promises and pitfalls, both perseverance and procrastination. It was both born out of – and resulting in – a relationship that not only blurred the boundaries between researched/researcher but also those chalk drawn lines between friend/informant/teacher. Certainly I was not the first to feel the strains and strengths of this type of work, as indeed much current anthropological work in general – and research with youth in particular – are characterized by relationships that both predate the research and continue long after one has left 'the field'. And I/we are also not the first to reflect upon the process, to reflexively interrogate the collaboration process.

But so far, I have been the one to do most of the writing, and except for a few fieldnotes, what you know of Birdie – and her experiences in this project – you have learned from me. Again, I turn to Agee for guidance, for as he says,

In a novel, a house or person has his meaning, his existence, entirely through the writer. Here, a house or a person has only the most limited of his meaning through me: his true meaning is much huger. It is that he *exists*, in actual being, as you do and as I do, and as no character of the

imagination can possibly exist. His great weight, mystery, and dignity are in this fact. As for me, I can tell you of him only what I saw, only so accurately as in my terms I know how: and this in turn has its chief stature not in any ability of mine but in the fact that I too exist, not as a work of fiction, but as a human being. (1941:27)

And so now, in what Agee would certainly call a feeble attempt at giving Birdie – the actual person – a ‘voice’, I do what little I can here by stepping off the page. What follows are six pieces written by Birdie several years after the research concluded, and included here unedited and in full. Given that “[i]n the hands of relatively privileged researchers studying those whose experiences have been marginalized, the reflexive mode’s potential to silence subjects is of particular concern,” (Fine & Weis, 2003:109) – I leave you, and this dissertation, in (and with) the words of Birdie herself.

Birdie Sings (At Last)

When I think back to the research Kaila and I conducted I am swarmed with a clusterfuck of ideas, emotional buzzing, a sense of something essential that is out of reach of the bear we call research, fumbling clumsily into the intricate workings of the operative hive. Perhaps this is why when I find myself in the bears shoes attempting to derive the substantial substance out of the everyday experiences of process I become infuriated enough to growl, and I swat at the emotional buzzing of the working bee within my bear self, thinking perhaps I need a new approach.

I was reluctant about the research in the first place. For one I had known Kaila as a youth group facilitator, later as a friend/mentor, then as an Anthro Professor and to consider myself somewhat of a co-anything on par with Kaila was intimidating to say the least. I was very doubtful about my ability to provide legitimate observations, research methods, etc. I was nervous also about permitting access into a group of people whose

lives are real and are lives in which I've invested friendships and support networks within. I was terrified about dissecting these individuals into subjects of research.

Having known Kaila and having built a solid friendship with her I was less anxious than if it were a complete stranger. On the other hand I began to question the foundation of our connection, was it solely built up, methodologically to enable this research to take place? Were her motives in the best interest of myself and my home crew? I wasn't always sure in the beginning, and I also felt incompetent in my abilities to be an assistant for the research, despite Kaila's encouragement and reassurance I often felt that she was assuming my abilities were greater than in reality.

Looking back, my own hesitations about the project was what made the work difficult. Being a part of, but not the brain of, the research made being confident about the end result difficult, and I prayed that Kaila would do it justice.

For the more I looked at the workings of communities within the community in which I lived I became sad and almost hopeless about the futures of my peers within their community. Despite the intelligence and self-sufficientness of the group of peers, the ways in which others perceived - and then as a result of misjudged perceptions - the ways in which others treated this group of youth was outrageously disturbing. And I had just accepted it as the way things worked. The sugar coating on a bitter cookie.

For such a small town it sure is one big obstacle. Some kids are born here and never leave. I mean never. One kid I know has only been to towns within a 20 mile radius. His family never had a car, papa loggin' in 70 hour work weeks at the plastic factory.

Mama busy raisin' the kids and being a lush. This kid is content enough with his situation, doesn't really see himself makin' it out in the wide world, and what would his family do without his income to help feed the chitlins now that daddy's hours have been cut.

By the end of the week my buddy's got enough coin for a 40 of Steel Reserve and a dime bag of shitweed to share with his crew. Others don't feel as indebted to the families that attempted to raise them. They jump at the opportunity to 'screw this place' and look to find a niche in the world where they feel worthy.

I had to get out. Sure I had a house and a job, but it wasn't a home or work that was worthwhile. Now I'm on the Road, standing on my own two feet, feeling grounded by the weight of the pack on my back, complete with a knife, toilet paper and a good book to read and then leave for some stranger on a park bench when I'm finished. I stopped at the golden arches today for a piss and a whore bath. That's when you wash the parts that count – face, pits and crotch – I ran my hair under the faucet too, it stank of layers of fire smoke, night after night of camping with a few road dogs, going from camp spot to camp spot. I never like to stay more than a few nights at a time at any given spot. When I first started out I set up camp for a good week, came back one day and everything had been trashed to shit by the E.P.s. Ruined my tarp and sleeping sack, dented my canned foods. Goddamn Environmental Police littering my shit all over the woods. I picked up after those assholes. I give a shit about the earth buddies, I swear to god if assholes didn't have dogs or cats they would be so disconnected from nature and in turn themselves that they would be going more mad than they even are now. The separation, the divide

between the humans and the natural world in which we should (could) be so interconnected with is growing larger and digging deeper. Splitting us off from each other and ourselves. When people see me and my family of friends, caked with dirt, unshaven and smiling, walking miles with our sharing of supplies and songs, a chord strikes in most of their souls and that's why they stare, that's why they become quiet as we walk past on the path least taken.

Do you ever feel that something fundamental is missing from your life? That something that you can't quite put your finger on because it seems as though you have pretty much everything you could need. A connection that is lacking but so close you can't deny the urge to grab aimlessly for what it could be.

And what with all the stress of having things, mortgage, rent, bills, car payments, but then life does become more enjoyable with these dare I say 'luxuries'? oh but these items are for the most part "necessary" you say, one does not want to admit that despite all personal belongings, all material measures of success taken into consideration, that one still longs for more. So then you begin collecting statues of Buddha, buying the prayer flags, junking up your life even more and pushing away that which you desire most. It is the emptiness that makes you uneasy, yet that is the very thing in which you need more of. Once one strips away their sense of ego, life becomes effortless. I have no T.V., I have no automobile, I have no desire besides basic survival.

In high school I had a revelation. It was 10th grade. I had a home with a fridge that had a meager amount of food at all times. I had access to the internet, television,

second hand clothes that I afforded by working part time at a pizza joint. Classes at school taught irrelevant information, history book history that some white guy who son wrote so long after the fact that we couldn't make an impact by learning it now. I was sent home with hours of regurgitation anticipated by the facists at school. I had no time for a bulemic education because I was off to work in the evenings until closing to help out with bills around the house. I also had to pay over \$300 for drivers education that year, so I was picking up any odd jobs like lawn care that came along. One day sitting in math class being taught to the test, "now remember this, class, because it's going to be on the MCAS. If you are going to learn anything here, learn this, it's on the test." At that moment something clicked. I came to terms with the fact that the person in charge of teaching me didn't care about my life, didn't care about what happened to me after high school, she was too only being told what to do, taking another persons order and up the ladder we go, captive at the mercy of another. That's when I thought, "damn, how is Pi ever going to help me out?" The people teaching me about Pi don't even understand it. Fuck trying to learn shit through binging and purging, I don't need a goddamn bulemic education. I'd rather learn though living. The wheels in my brain were spinning against becoming part of the machine. I walked out of class and dropped out of school. My split second decision to become a highschool dropout didn't fly with my mom, she feared I would amount to nothing without a highschool diploma. Even though I'd picked up another job and had been helping out with household bills for my mom and siblings, she kicked me out saying I was a bad influence for not finishing high school. Stories similar to mine are pretty common, a lot of kids I knew were treated pretty disrespectfully by teachers and other faculty.

I had always been ashamed of being poor and hid my shame behind second hand brand names, determined to prove to no one in particular that I was worth something, pretending I had paid full price for my Abercrombie & Fitch hoodie. Teachers never bothered me. It was the group of kids that embraced their poverty that got the brunt of the scrutiny. Holely clothes and safety pin pierced ears, hair knotted into dreads, rarely sleeping at home because who knew if mom or dad, aunt or uncle or foster parent would be sober and safe that night, if they were even occupying the premise in the evening times.

Everyone I know is as stagnate as the dam in our town. Only when the systematic structure in place releases will each of them release, one by one, spilling in frenzy to the point of rushing.

My people crave movement, just as the pent up dam water, contentment is an illusion with each. Both have their moments, when the rain sings down and spills the water over the entrapment, so too do our songs and dance free us from the powers in place.

We do not feel below them. We do not feel below you. We may be low class, but our heads are held high and we continue rising, reaching for a mark higher than your bank account.

I cannot account for the years of co-researching, for I was also among the researched. I cannot separate field from fieldwork, participation with friends from P.O., the non-relevant from vital.

.....

I cannot speak of data gathered, I have been frustrated by my inability to relay insights and information about my experiences in a field that I was an active member of the community under study. Having no separation between the struggle of research and the struggle of living proved to be incapacitating.

I was viewing my environment through a lens that highlighted key structural issues within the community. Rather than being confident that the research would benefit my community I became overwhelmed and disheartened by my new perceptions. I began to feel threatened that this work would come to be merely ‘interesting’ to some yuppies down the road. Another book on the shelf to prove they “understand’ any given population.

I was too immersed within the crew to be much more than a gateway for Kaila into the ‘hidden population’. I often felt very guilty that I could not be of more assistance, or that I wasn’t living up to the expectations as a co-researcher.

In the same way that I, and others reject services, this research took on a similar vibration for me as a potentially beneficial, but ultimately slanted method of service to a community.

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